

THE GOSPEL AMONG OUR HINDU NEIGHBOURS

Edited
by Vinay Samuel
and Chris Sugden



The Gospel Among Our Hindu Neighbours

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Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden

Partnership in Mission-Asia



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By the same editors

Evangelism and the Poor — A Third World Study Guide
Partnership in Mission Asia, 1983.

Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World

Partnership in Mission Asia, 1983. Papers and discussions from the First Conference of Evangelical Mission Theologians from the Two Thirds World, Bangkok, March 1982.

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Introduction

The gospel of Jesus Christ has been in India for a long time. We need to hear what our Hindu neighbours make of the gospel. They can help us understand ourselves, and help us to discover how we are perceived.

These papers by Christian and Hindu scholars pose the questions that need to be addressed, suggest guidelines, and provide keys for making the gospel relevant to our Hindu neighbours. They were prepared for and presented at a study conference organised by The Association for Evangelical Theological Education in India (14 Waddell Road, Kilpauk, Madras-600 010) and Partnership in Mission Asia (P.O. Box 544, Bangalore-560 005).

The A. E. T. E. I. is an association of over twenty evangelical theological seminaries and training institutions committed to improving the quality and relevance of evangelical theological education in India. At present over 660 students are registered in B. Th. programmes in seminaries in the association. PIM Asia is a network of theologians and writers engaged in practical ministries in Asia and committed to facilitating the writing of Christian theological and training literature relevant to mission in the Asian context.

The papers focus on what the nature of Christian witness to the gospel among our Hindu neighbours is actually like. They describe Christian witness to Hindus rather than prescribe what that witness ought to be like. They try to present the current situation so that we may relate the gospel to Hindus in a better way. Two papers examine the nature and impact of Christian witness among Hindus in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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Witness to Hindus is not witness to a religious system but to groups of people who are set in specific social, political, economic and religious contexts, and have their own world-views. Two papers examine how two particular groups, women and dalits (Untouchables) experience and view Hinduism, and two papers describe relations between Hindus and Moslems, whom they perceive as a threat.

We are particularly concerned to hear how others outside the Christian family perceive Hinduism and Christianity, so three papers come from non-Christian contributors.

An increasingly important area of study is "folk religion" which co-exists among groups of people alongside more philosophical Hinduism. One paper describes this phenomenon and another offers a valuable analysis of the place of folk religion in religious beliefs. Research by students of the M. Th. in Missiology course of the A. E. T. E. I. in Madras established that many poor Christians hold orthodox Christian beliefs along with many spiritist practices of folk religion. So further research is needed in this whole field of folk religion because for poor people it is both a refuge from the hard pressures of life, and a protest. It is a protest against views of reality imposed on them from above by people with economic and political power who want to use religion as a tool to control.

Jesus himself understood the protests of the poor against a religious system imposed on them from above. He described the work of the Pharisees as a process of tying heavy burdens on people's backs. A final paper suggests that a fruitful area for sharing the meaning of the gospel in a Hindu context is in dialogue with the questions and protests of the poor.

Christology is at the heart of our witness to our Hindu neighbours. The conference noted that the Hindu renaissance of the nineteenth century was in response not to an unknown

Christ but to the historic Christ proclaimed and demonstrated by the church. Christian witness cannot be authentic without such a proclamation. For even though we may acknowledge the work of Christ among other religions, we need the biblical proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth as our normative guide in order to recognize his work among people of other faiths, and enable them to find him as the answer to their quests.

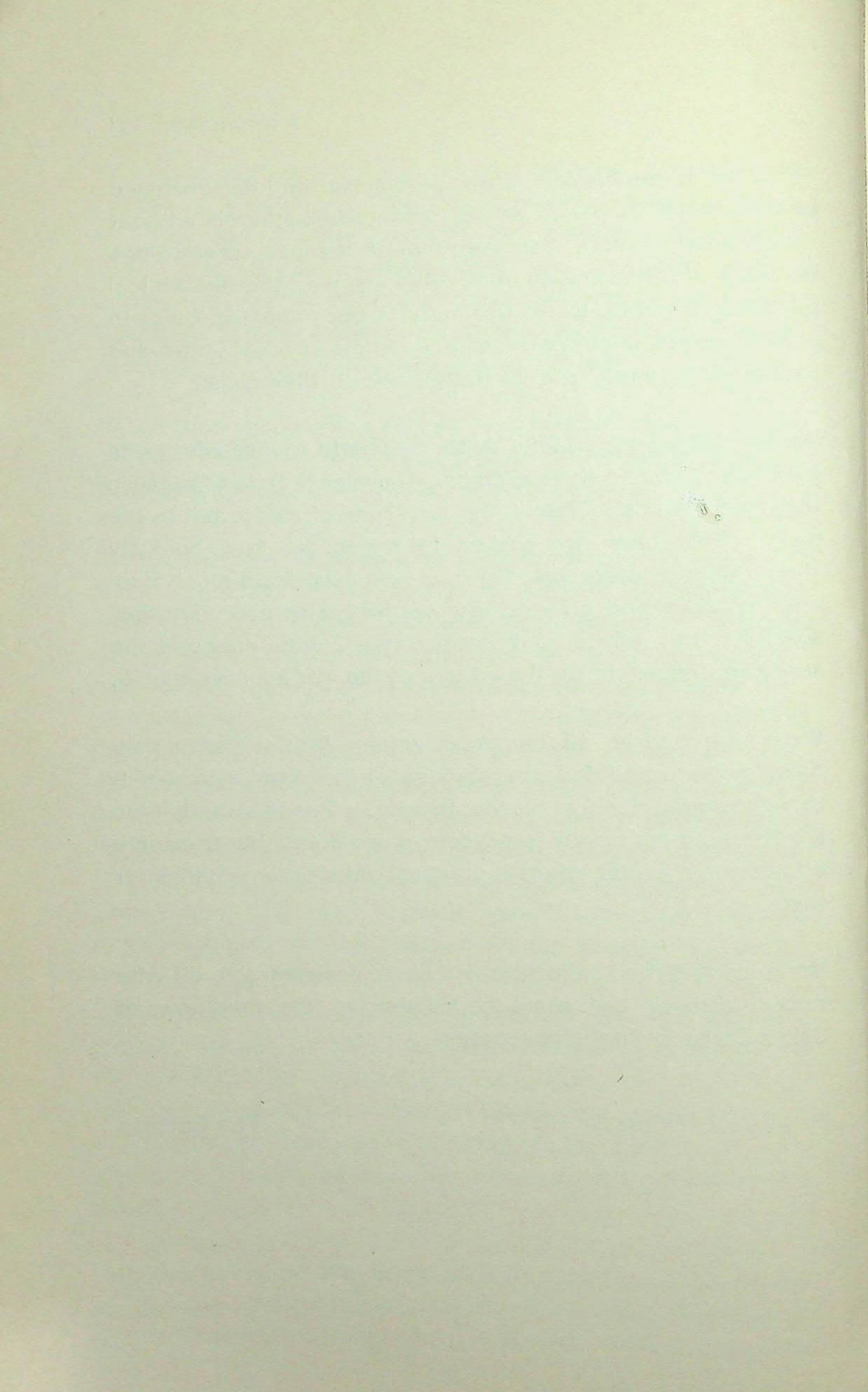
We are especially grateful to those Hindu friends who came to speak to us and share with us. They speak frankly because they are friends. They have not been afraid to tell us the truth. They have not spoken in anger, but have honestly shared their perspectives with us. We may learn much from their wisdom and advice. But we may also note that they speak for themselves, and not for those who arranged the study conference or for the editors of the conference volume.

We are grateful to all the paper writers for the papers they have written, and for the obvious enthusiasm with which they presented them at the conference. This shows that we are listening not merely to academics speaking, but to people addressing a matter of great practical mission importance for them.

We hope that this collection will be of assistance to all who seek to discover and share the meaning of the good news of Jesus Christ in the Indian context.

Bangalore, Pentecost 1983

The Editors



1.

Late Nineteenth Century Protestant Christian Attitudes towards Hinduism

Graham Houghton

Generally speaking, in the late 19th century at least three approaches were employed by missionaries and their agents when presenting the gospel. A critical and uncompromising opposition to all things Hindu stressed the gulf of differences that separated them. A more cognitive approach appealed for a deep and sympathetic knowledge of Hindu life and thought as preliminary to and essential for an effective ministry. A third "contextual" approach (the word is appropriate but was not in use then), emphasised the resemblances between Christianity and Hinduism and allowed for the development of an Indian theology that attempted to make Christ and the gospel more relevant.

Some felt that to cultivate an intimate knowledge of Hinduism was a waste of time. Rev. Mackenzie Cobban, of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission, recalled that when he first arrived in India, a "venerable missionary" advised him not to meddle with Hindu literature but that he should, "Preach Hinduism is from beneath, Christianity is from above". His creed was, said Cobban that "Hinduism [was] of the devil and must be destroyed".¹ Rev. John P. Jones, of the American Madura Mission, had a similar experience. "It was laid down," he said, "as a fundamental postulate of [missionary] belief that Hinduism was of the devil, and that, coming from below, it must be

1. G. Mackenzie Cobban, 'Christianity and the Hindu Faiths', *Madras Christian College Magazine* (September 1889), p. 199.

2 Nineteenth Century Attitudes towards Hinduism

shunned as a study and denounced root and branch as a thing purely satanic".²

The Critical Approach

This basic attitude toward Hinduism was expressed in a variety of forms both by missionaries as well as Indian Christians. Rev. W. Robinson recalled listening to a street evangelist entertain a crowd for forty minutes with a discourse on the Lingam. When he reminded the evangelist of the need to "preach the gospel", the missionary was summarily informed, "I must point out all the errors of Hinduism first, sir, before I can convince them of Christianity".³

S. V. Thomas considered Hinduism to be without meaning ; for it possessed the ever changing characteristics of a chameleon.

It is a nondescript something which deals largely in gods who cut each other's throats and commit adultery with each other's wives ; which abounds with rats that go to heaven because they trimmed a temple-light while engaged in drinking the oil, and with men who go to hell because they were a minute too late in throwing a flower on an idol.⁴

The worship of "dumb idols" was considered a hindrance to true worship, for the most degrading concepts of God were formed in the minds of otherwise naturally intelligent people. It was also understood as the mark of a primitive civilization, supported in the main by women who were allowed to grow up in ignorance and, through the family, to perpetuate the reign of superstition.⁵

2. J.P. Jones, 'Hinduism and Christianity : Their Contact and Affinities', (March 1897), p. 83.

3. W. Robinson, 'The Use and Abuse of Hindu Mythology in Preaching to Hindus', *Harvest Field* (January 1901), p. 9.

4. S.V. Thomas, 'The Hindu Tract Society', *Madras Christian College Magazine* (April 1889), p. 735.

5. 'Idolatry, A Mark of Low Civilization', *Progress* (May 1903), p. 122.

Any encouragement to acquire a knowledge of Hinduism was, at least up to the latter part of the century, usually given with a view to discrediting it. A popular method of proclaiming the gospel was to compare and contrast it with Hinduism. The virtues of the one were extolled at the expense of the other. In one instance reported in *Progress* (an illustrated monthly journal designed to appeal to the educated) the two ideas on the forgiveness of sin were examined. It was argued that according to the doctrine of karma the possibility of pardon for sin did not arise, for "The fruit of every action, good or bad, must be eaten".⁶ At the same time, Hindus were charged with believing that the most heinous of sins could be "removed by trifling ceremonies".⁷ These included, "Bathing in supposed sacred waters, Pilgrimages to supposed sacred places, Listening to certain Books repeated, Dying in Benares, Bhakti [and] Gnana". All were dismissed as "refuges of lies" which would "fail in the day of trial". By contrast the Christian ideas of deep sorrow and confession of sin, prayer for pardon, followed by a moral reformation, were presented as commending themselves to the acceptance of "intelligent men". Interestingly the author did try to relate his argument to the context by referring to the writer of the Psalms as a "Rajarishi" and the Bible as the "Christian Veda".⁸

Rev. Maurice Phillips of the London Missionary Society in an article, 'The Great Problems of Religion solved by Jesus Christ', asked what Hindu Philosophy had done for the people and their happiness. Had it not sanctioned the greatest curse of all – caste? Did it not justify the worship of everything from the sun above to lizards and rats beneath? "How can people be happy when writhing under the tyranny of caste, and grovelling in the dust in adoration of a cobra?" And yet, said Phillips, this is what is promulgated by the priests and

6. 'Hindu and Christian Ideas of the Pardon of Sin', *Progress* (July 1901), p. 3.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

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philosophers as the means of making people happy. "The consequences," he charged, "are obvious everywhere in the prevalence of poverty, ignorance, superstition and misery."⁹

The offensive against Hinduism is nowhere more apparent than in the literature of tracts. (These were about fifty pages long—our present day tract would be called a handbill). In one, still being published in 1899, Rev. A. Vethakan tells the story of a man named "Thoughtless", who believed in the pursuit of pleasure as the grand purpose of life and spent his time in idle conversation, chewing betel, and gambling. He began to think seriously about the meaning of life when a close friend died without hope. His name was then changed to "Inquirer", and he set off on a long pilgrimage in search of forgiveness of sin. He met one who reminded him that the Shastras prescribe the application of the sacred ash as the remedy for all kinds of sin and crime.

"Inquirer" responds :

Ashes, though very useful for cleaning the teeth, rubbing brass vessels, manuring fields and such other purposes, cannot remove sin whose seat is in the heart. If the smearing of cowdung ashes could remove sin, eating the flesh of the cow must of necessity secure a more ready admission into heaven. Again curds, milk, ghee, etc., which are the essence of the animal, must be still more effectual in accomplishing the above object. Why then am I still in my sins notwithstanding that I use some of the above mentioned articles of food every day ?¹⁰

Vaishnavism, bathing and pilgrimages, are all considered and found wanting. A Shastri tells "Inquirer" of transmigration and that by being born in a lower order of creation his soul would be purified of sin. But, asked the pilgrim incredul-

9. Maurice Phillips, 'The Great Problems of Religion Solved by Jesus Christ', *Madras Christian College Magazine* (November 1883), p.262.

10. A. Vethakan, 'Choose the Best', Murdoch, *Selected Tracts*(1870), p.29.

lously, "will a seed that cannot sprout in water, germinate in fire?"¹¹ He next met a man walking along the road repeating the words, "Rama! Rama!", and while agreeing that Rama was a great saint, wondered what he had done for the salvation of sinners. He even wondered whether Rama could hear the cry of men repeating his name when "he did not hear the voice of his own wife, Sita, when she was captured by Ravana and taken to the forest of Asoke in Ceylon".¹² "Inquirer" dismissed the Vedas and Shastras as not being able to "stand the touchstone of Reason".¹³ Islam was likewise written off as "nothing but heathenism in another guise".¹⁴ The story ends with "Inquirer" receiving Christ as his Saviour; his first acquaintance with the gospel comes interestingly enough by listening to a street preacher.¹⁵

The most vitriolic example of the length to which some missionaries would go in their efforts to subvert Hinduism as a part of their homilectical method is provided by the pen of Rev. John Scudder of the American Arcot Mission in his very lengthy tract, 'Spiritual Teaching'. Before presenting to his readers the plan of salvation according to the gospel of Christ he charges them with having abandoned the truth that there is only one God, for the belief in the falsehood that there are many gods. He suggests that it is due to perverted reason that one is able to "bow down to gods who are not",¹⁶ and proceeds to consider several Hindu deities from the witness of the Puranas and Shastras. He provides chapter and stanza references in every case; and after giving the literal translation and the general meaning of numerous quotations of scripture, he then made his point.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

16. John W Scudder 'Spiritual Teaching', quoted in Murdoch, *Selected Tracts*, (1870), p. 356 (Tamil Tract).

From passages quoted, Scudder noted two things about Brahma. First, he "lusted after his own daughter, and when resisted by her made every effort to accomplish his base purpose by force". Then on his return from a fruitless search for Siva's head, not only did Brahma lie declaring he had found it, but induced the wild pine flower also to lie on his behalf. "Consider," asked Scudder, "is it right to call an adulterer and a liar good?...What mean you then by pronouncing him a god when you cannot even call him good?...Such being the history of Brahma, we affirm certainly that he is not a god."¹⁷

In turning to Vishnu and his incarnation as Krishna, Scudder continued, "the tenth Skanda of the B'hagavagita tells us that Krishna wantonly sported with and ravished the Gopika women...[the] details disgusting beyond degree, are fitted only to injure the mind, and awaken the most corrupt desires".¹⁸ In the stanzas referred to, he observes that "Krishna debauched many cowherdresses...seduced and ruined Kuni, Kansa's maid-servant... stole butter and curds... killed Kansa's washerman and plundering the royal clothing distributed it among his friends". He finally even killed his uncle Kansa.¹⁹ Scudder countered the excuse that Vishnu did these things while in one of his Avatars by arguing that such an explanation "is utterly vain and worthless. At no time, and under no circumstances whatever can sin be predicated of God. He is always and everywhere the most Holy."²⁰

Siva was presented in no more favourable light. His unnatural intercourse with Vishnu which resulted in the birth of Aiyanar; his blatant lying after being beaten by Parvati at dice; and his ravishing of the wives of the Rishis of Tarugavanam are all exposed.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 361.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

20. *Ibid.*

Scudder's last assault was upon the text of Hindu sacred literature; an examination of which makes plain, he said, "that neither Brahma, nor Vishnu, nor Siva is the true God". If the sacred writings were the depositories of truth, why would not we ascribe deity to those who lied, stole, and committed adultery? Such claims are "nowhere to be found in a book of truth". Therefore, Scudder concluded, "the B'harata, the Ramayana, the B'hagavagita, the Skanda Purana, and all the other works, in which you so fondly believe, are nothing else than lying fables, wickedly concocted by false and designing men".²¹

In anticipating the reaction his tract might produce, Scudder took the precaution in its preface to remind his readers, whom he referred to as "brethren", that he spoke in love and that he did not wish to "enter into controversy" or to revile or abuse them, but that they might be in a position to reject falsehood and embrace the truth.²² When all is said and done it would appear that Scudder was merely confirming the creed widely held at that time, that Hinduism was demonic in origin and must at all costs be destroyed.²³

Apparently sensitive to such criticism, certain apologists defended Hinduism. They asserted its superiority on the grounds of its extreme religious tolerance as opposed to the narrowness and intolerance of Christianity, which alone claimed to be the voice of God. But even this proposition was harshly overruled in *Progress*: "The tolerance of Hinduism means that it is indifferent to truth and falsehood, ... So far as Hinduism cares one is as good as another ... even Christianity could find a place in its wide bosom except for its great activity in 'proselyting'."²⁴ On the other hand, "the intolerance

21. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

23. G. Mackenzie Cobban, 'Hindu Faiths', *Madras Christian College Magazine* (September 1889), p. 199.

24. 'The Tolerance of Hinduism and the Intolerance of Christianity', *Progress* (October 1887), p. 43.

of Christianity is its love of truth ... [It is] exclusive, because loyal to truth, and because truth is but one."²⁵

The Cognitive Approach

By the end of the century considerable apprehension was being expressed by certain missionaries over what they felt was an overly critical attitude within the Christian community toward Hinduism.

In an article, 'The Use and Abuse of Hindu Mythology in Preaching to Hindus', Robinson noted that it had always seemed rather ridiculous to him that Christians assumed they were absolutely right and the Hindus absolutely wrong. He equally despised the contention that

all we have to do is merely to go into a village, declare a message and evangelise all heathendom in this generation, [was] to expect to gather figs of thorns and grapes of thistles. It is like trying to knock down a fort with a child's pop-gun.²⁶

In fact, Jones, writing in 1908, was of the opinion that the day had come,

when missionaries must study with more seriousness the religion of India, that they may understand its true inwardness and discover its sources of power. Above all, they must be conversant with its highest ideals and understand the relationship of the same to those of their own faith. And they must not forget that they must approach this study with genuine sympathy and appreciation, in order to find the best in Hinduism, as well as to be fortified against its worst features.²⁷

25. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

26. W. Robinson, 'Use and Abuse', *Harvest Field* (January 1901), p. 16.

27. John P. Jones, *India Its Life and Thought* (New York, Macmillan Company, 1908), p. 241.

Naturally some were convinced that any effort to understand non-Christian literature and religions was a misplaced priority. For them, it was enough to study the language, acquire a working vocabulary, and preach. However, in Cobban's view, although they preached with earnestness and even with fluency "they chiefly beat the air".²⁸ Much more than facility in the language was needed. For effectiveness said Rev. Henry Haigh in presenting a paper to the Bangalore Missionary Conference in 1894, missionaries upon arrival in India should "be trained to the thought of these people". Haigh deplored the fact that so much in the presentation of the gospel fell "very unimpressively on Hindu ears". We are, he asserted, "in no vital sense in accord with those who hear".²⁹ He expressed astonishment over just how few missionaries had really gained an intelligent grasp of what was included under the term Hinduism. "It is the citadel they have come to storm, but they have really not examined it, and so they only throw a few shells at it indiscriminately, in the hope that a little breach may be made here and there." The result was, Haigh observed, that while individual converts had been won the more stable elements of India's vast population remained unmoved.³⁰

Haigh did of course concede that a certain "popular knowledge of Hinduism abounded" and that everyone had picked up "smart points" which were habitually repeated in dealing with people. He then appealed for a more thorough knowledge of what was common between the two faiths, of what the differences were, what ideas underlay those differences and how they were to be worked out in daily living.³¹

The lack of a working knowledge of Hinduism extended to the content of theological education. In a survey of the 28 divinity

28. G. Mackenzie Cobban, 'Hindu Faiths', *Madras Christian College Magazine* (September 1889), p. 199.

29. Henry Haigh 'The Training of Missionaries', *Harvest Field* (March 1894), p. 327.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 328.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

schools among Protestant Missions in India in 1893, Jones was quite astonished that even the "highest" among them gave "no place in their scheme of studies for an examination of the religion of the land". For him, the greatest deficiency among mission agents was their knowledge of Hinduism. They were woefully ignorant of its history, principles and interpretation. For these reasons they were seriously "wanting in the means of reaching and converting their brethren". Next to a knowledge of the Christian faith, no other knowledge, in Jones' opinion, was possessed of so much utility and power to a servant of Christ.³²

Nor could the subject of understanding Hinduism remain "a matter of indifference" to those who loved India. After all, said Dr. William Miller, Principal of Madras Christian College, it was the main product of the thought of India. It had, he said, even greatly influenced those who had never been within its bounds or who, in the case of converts, had expressly taken themselves beyond it. For the large majority of the Indian people Hinduism was an all-powerful force which made them what they were and therefore whatever else it was it could "never be regarded as insignificant".³³

Behind much of the appeal for a more intimate understanding of Hinduism lay an even greater concern for the conversion of the educated classes. Rev. T. E. Slater, who worked in Madras with the London Missionary Society, recognised the steadily increasing influence of the educated classes, which he felt, far out weighed their numerical strength. They were, he said "everywhere becoming the brain and voice of the country" and yet there was no class that stood "more in need of the Gospel".³⁴

32. John P. Jones, 'Protestant Mission Theological Training Institutions in India', *Harvest Field* (July 1893).

33. William Miller, 'The Place of Hinduism in the Story of the World', *Madras Christian College Magazine* (April 1895), p. 584.

34. T.E. Slater, 'How to Reach the Educated Hindus Apart from the Higher Education in College', *Harvest Field* (June 1903), p. 217.

Slater was hard pressed to accept the position taken by Bishop Henry Whitehead that the Brahmans and upper classes had had their "chance". For, argued the Bishop, the Gospel had first been preached to those who by birth, hereditary training and education had been most naturally fitted to receive it but that as a class they had "rejected" it.³⁵ However in spite of the consistent work done among the educated classes Slater considered that not until the ground had been covered far more systematically could any class in India be said to have had its "chance".³⁶ In 1902 on the basis of the fact that in his opinion Christianity had failed to make a significant impact on the upper classes, Bishop Whitehead advocated that the time had come for Protestant Missions to direct their efforts toward the poor and the depressed classes. Slater did not reject the idea out of hand. He endorsed the Bishop's plea. "Let the Pariah, in Christ's name, have the chance that has so long and cruelly been denied him;" he said, "but remember, that when thousands and thousands of those have been converted, we 'may not have touched Hinduism proper one bit'." Slater's point was that if the gospel of Christ was going to win the heart and mind of India and if the Church was to grow into a factor to be reckoned with in Indian society, then the upper classes could only be neglected at the expense of the faithlessness of the Church and as a "humiliating confession of failure".³⁷

In attempting to establish a theory of relationships as a working hypothesis between Christianity and Hinduism, Mackenzie Cobban in an article, 'Christianity and the Hindu Faiths' published in the *Madras Christian College Magazine* in 1889, noted that for all practical purposes the choice lay between two theories; the one that other faiths were systems of error while

35. Quoted *Ibid.*, p.218.. taken from Report of the Fourth Decennial Indian Missionary Conference, 11-18 December, 1902 (Madras Christian Literature Society, 1903).

36. *Ibid.*, p 218.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Christianity alone was a depository of truth; the other, that non-Christian faiths were true but incomplete, or mixed with positive error while Christianity was a perfect scheme of spiritual truth and a corrective and fulfillment of other faiths. The former theory was generally held by those who, according to Cobban, tended to minimise the possibility of non-Christian or pre-Christian truth. This position, if pressed, inclined toward atheism for it excluded God from a great part of the world and made grace and truth the monopoly of a few. Whereas, "we worship a God revealed; who has never been inaccessible or unknown to men, who has been present in all lands". Cobban's understanding was that religion and goodness were possible to men of every race. He quoted Acts 10 : 3 regarding Cornelius to support his position.³⁸

Cobban was comfortable with a working theory of relationship that Christianity was antagonistic to error, but had an affinity for spiritual truth wherever it was found. Fragments of spiritual truth found in other faiths were to be "affirmed the same in kind as that which exists in Christianity".³⁹ In giving the truth found within Hinduism a cordial recognition we were, according to Cobban, being no more generous than the apostle Paul toward the Roman world. That world he said, was rather like contemporary India in character. Moreover the Romans had suppressed the truth by their wickedness. "And thus of Hindus also by whom truth is trampled, we may say that their guilt consists in this, that they do not obey the truth which they know." Wise missionary effort, noted Cobban, would recognise this truth.⁴⁰

Perhaps understandably, not everyone approved of Cobban's views. One such person was Rev. Ernst Just of the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Tranquebar. In an article, 'The

38. C. Mackenzie Cobban, 'Hindu Faiths', *Madras Christian College Magazine* (September 1889), p.196.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

True Christian Conception of Hindu Religions' published in the *Harvest Field* in 1891 he presented a rebuttal to Mackenzie Cobban. Just denied that spiritual truth could be discovered outside the Christian revelation. All that resembled Christian truth, wherever it was found was adjudged to be "plain error".⁴¹ He preferred to distinguish between spiritual truth and natural truth. He asserted that if any truth was to be identified in non-Christian religions it was of the natural and not of the spiritual order. Ernst Just therefore rejected the approach of Cobban that there was spiritual truth in Hinduism, which, if only understood and utilised as a point of contact would aid the evangelist in shattering and expelling its error. For an effective ministry among Hindus Just relied rather on an "appeal to God's revelation in nature and history, to their conscience, to their experience of sin, to their involuntary striving after the Absolute and their unspoken desire for eternal bliss".⁴²

Furthermore, Just was convinced Cobban was ascribing spiritual truth to such Hindu concepts as: body, mind, soul, sin, salvation, heaven and hell. But Cobban agreed that what these terms convey among Hindus was wholly distinct from what the same terms communicate to Christians. But Just was at pains to establish that the difference between Christianity and other religions was more than one of degree. To believe otherwise was, in Just's mind, to contradict the general teaching of the Bible. Paul was not ashamed to maintain the unique character of the gospel before the Romans, nor was he according to I Thess 9:5. afraid to affirm that "the heathen do not know God".⁴³ On the other hand, Just said he was, "far from denying that non Christian systems aspire to the loftiest aims under divine stimulus". What he did deny was that by means of this stimulus "pagan philosophers"

41. Ernst Just. 'The True Christian Conception of Hindu Religions', *Harvest Field* (September 1891), p. 84.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

43. Ernst Just 'True Christian', *Harvest Field* (September 1891), p. 82.

were able to establish positive spiritual truth. "They were so far from arriving by its aid at positive truths, that they have actually used it for establishing positive errors." In Just's opinion the Hindu "bias" to seek for the absolute Lord of Creation has proved to be the source of the doctrine of the "absolute All". Likewise the craving for perfect righteousness did not help them to seek for it but led to a denial of guilt, while the longing of their "heart for the highest bliss did not induce them to pursue the search for it but reluctantly to resign themselves to eternal dissolution".⁴⁴

Six months later, in another article, 'The Apostolic Method of Preaching, a Pattern for Indian Missionaries', Just acknowledged that certain "forms of truth" surrounded the Hindu concepts of God, sin and salvation. But he warned that this was no ground for Christians to praise Hinduism, for such ideas came from God. He was equally convinced of the futility of quoting "heathen authors" in order to make people renounce error, for while such quotations seemed to oppose error they may be closely related to it. Pantheism was "related to idolatry as the whole to its parts". After all, error could "never be exploded by error, but only by the truth".⁴⁵

In a contribution to the debate in an article entitled 'What Gospel are we to Preach to the Hindus?', Rev. W. Sinclair of Kathiawar observed that the difference between Just and those he criticised, namely Cobban, was essentially one of semantics. He felt that Just rather unnecessarily depreciated indirect methods and preparatory work. He was quite certain that Just would acknowledge the wisdom of beginning a gospel address at a point of identity likely to command assent rather than to "plunge boldly into disputed topics".⁴⁶ But Cobban

44. *ibid* p. 89.

45. Ernst Just, 'The Apostolic Method of Preaching: Pattern for Indian Missionaries' *Harvest Field* (March 1892), p.336.

46. W. Sinclair 'What Gospel are we to Preach to the Hindus?', *Harvest Field* (June 1892), p. 451.

seems to have been quite secure in the position he took for he did not respond to his detractors either in the *Harvest Field* or in the *Christian College Magazine*.

Rev. John Jones of the Madura Mission had obviously made a very thorough study of the various aspects of Hinduism. He recognised in such knowledge a check against an "arrogance of mind" and the possibility of a "feeling of contempt" which he cautioned could develop among missionaries toward the people they had come to reach for Christ.⁴⁷ He therefore appealed for a more accurate evaluation of Hinduism by missionaries and a greater appreciation of "the numerous truths which it holds in common" with the Christian faith. At the same time Jones made it clear that he was not making a plea for a compromise with Hinduism. He had seen too much of "its deadening influence upon life and debasing of the ideals and morals of the millions who were enchained by it", for that.⁴⁸

It was however imperative, according to Jones, for Christian ministers to recognise that the battle to win India centred around the primary conceptions and fundamental postulates concerning God, man and the meaning of life. Christianity could never be attractive to an intelligent Hindu until it had won his assent at these vital points. We fail to impress orthodox Hindus simply because our presentation of the gospel does not fit into their pattern of thinking. We antagonise his presuppositions and violate his most "cherished ideals of religious life and spiritual endowment which, from time immemorial, have been handed down to him".⁴⁹ These ideals are the inheritance of every Hindu. They allure and command him on one hand and act as his ultimate criteria on the other. They are, asserted Jones, in basic conflict with those ideals presented as the *summum bonum* of Christian life.

47. John P. Jones, 'Hinduism and Christianity', *Harvest Field* (March 1897), p. 82.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

49. John P. Jones, *India*, 1908, p. 220.

To illustrate, Jones drew attention to four of these: the Divine ideal, Hindu and Christian conceptions of Incarnation, ideals of life and of ultimate salvation. We shall look more closely at the first to understand more fully Jones' point. He noted that a fundamental difference of opinion existed between Hinduism and Christianity on the nature of the Godhead. "To the Hindu, the Supreme Soul or Brahma is idealized Intelligence; to the Christian, God is perfect Will. To the former He is supreme Wisdom; to the other He is infinite Goodness." In aspiring toward the ideal of their respective faiths the goal for the Hindu "is brahma gnana (Divine Wisdom)"; while for the Christian "it is the supreme love of goodness". Hence at its very foundation Hinduism has always "placed *perfect intelligence* as its corner stone" while the basis of Christianity has always been an "ideal of *ethical perfection*".

For this reason, argued Jones, the great root of bitterness which Hinduism, from the very beginning, has sought to remove has been ignorance, "that intellectual blindness which persists in maintaining that the self and the Supreme Soul are separate realities and which is the only barrier to the self's final emancipation and final absorption into the Divine". On the other hand, to the Christian, the dread enemy is sin "that moral obliquity which differentiates the soul from the perfect ethical beauty of God". From this, salvation as the *summum bonum* to be sought by the one, is self-knowledge, and by the other is self-realisation in conformity to the divine will. Jones did not assert that moral rectitude was absent from Hindu ambition nor deny that the Christian accepted that "eternal life is to know God". But the supreme emphasis given by the one to nescience (ignorance) as the evil to be removed, and to wisdom as the crowning grace to be achieved, and, by the other, to rebellion of heart against God as the great sin, and to transformation to his moral image as perfected salvation, was much too marked to be overlooked by students of the two faiths and by Christian

missionaries. Further more, concluded Jones, until the Christian teacher could show the excellence of the supreme ideals of Christianity in a way that would move his Hindu friends, his work could not be said to have achieved any sense of triumph.⁵⁰

The Contextual Approach

The appeal, among missionaries, for a greater measure of understanding and sympathy toward Hinduism not unexpectedly led by the same logic, to a further plea for contextualising Christian theology by which Christ would become more relevant to the Hindu. Rev. E. W. Redfern thought that too often the work of Christian mission had had its reason in a sympathy that was from without, that is in pity. We need, he said, to get within, to think India's thoughts, to see with her eyes, to share her despair, to correct her mistakes, and "bring her to the living God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who came not to destroy her ancient temples, but to purify and transform".⁵¹ Redfern was convinced that when the early Church appealed to the Greeks for their allegiance they did not offer them a fixed and unalterable set of theological maxims, the acceptance of which meant conversion, while rejection was proof of paganism. "Theology, being human, can never legitimately become stereotyped, or hope in this world to arrive at completeness," he said, "it must ever have as associate a willingness to accept modification or development under the guidance of the Spirit of God."⁵² Redfern argued that theology was bound to assume a form different in India from that of the West for the simple reason that the religious and metaphysical atmosphere in India was so entirely different.⁵³ After all, noted Rev. John Hardy in an article 'The

50. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

51. E. W. Redfern, 'Hindu and Christian Aspects of the Doctrine of God', *Harvest Field* (April 1900), p. 171.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

53. *Ibid.*

Chief Hindrances to the Spread of the Kingdom of Christ in India', published in the *Harvest Field*, "to insist on Christianity wearing the same clothes in India as it does in the West is a fatal blunder".⁵⁴

Another who wrestled with the same issue was Rev. Bernard Lucas who worked in Bellary with the London Missionary Society. He emphasised that the Christian mission was to preach Christ and him crucified "leaving India to construct for herself her own theology".⁵⁵ Lucas was even willing to "welcome...a little genuine heresy". If Christianity was to take a real hold of the heart and mind of India it was certain, he said, to give rise to new heresies and reproduce old ones. Such a course of events was not a cause for disappointment. For the emergence of heresies would, Lucas advised, "do as much good in India as they had done in the West". However to be of any significant use they "must be genuine products of the soil and not imported exotics".⁵⁶

At the same time both Lucas⁵⁷ and Hardy⁵⁸ cautioned that in stripping Christian expression of its western robes care should be taken that certain essentials were not at the same time pared away. Even so, Lucas asserted that Christianity was much greater than the western conception of it, and that the face of Christ had a much richer beauty than any canvas yet produced by western artists. "I claim," he said, "that India should be allowed to see Christ for herself, and have the fullest liberty to record in her own way the impressions she receives."⁵⁹ The *Harvest Field* fully agreed with Lucas and added its own testimony to his views. The editors declared

54. John Hardy, 'The Chief Hindrances to the Spread of the Kingdom of Christ in India', *Harvest Field* (May 1904), p. 183.

55. B. Lucas, 'The Adaption of Western Christianity to India', *Harvest Field* (July 1904), p. 262

56. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

58. John Hardy, 'Chief Hindrances', *Harvest Field* (May 1904), p. 183

59. B. Lucas, 'Western Christianity', *Harvest Field* (July 1904), p. 254.

with all the emphasis at their command their firm belief that "for Christianity to fully accomplish its founder's purpose in India, it must ultimately assume its Eastern dress, and be altogether unconditioned by the various forms it has taken to itself or had thrust upon it" by both Europe and America.⁶⁰ The *Harvest Field* was of the opinion that given time, the Indian Christian community would more fully apprehend Christ and develop a more complete form of Christian theology than the West had hitherto to been able to accomplish.⁶¹

The *Harvest Field* editors were equally convinced in 1900 that until the Indian Church became self supporting, and thereby independent of foreign aid it could not develop distinctive forms of Church life and witness. As long as the Indian Church placed such dependence, in whole or in part, upon the West, inevitably "the representatives of the West should considerably influence, if not altogether control, their organisation".⁶² A similar point was made by Rev. F.W. Steinthal⁶³ and John Hardy who thought that the infusion of foreign money into the Indian Church was one of the major hindrances to the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ.⁶⁴

Lastly, in the Church's effort to make Christ known among Hindus the issues were not understood to be only intellectual. Considerable emphasis was placed upon human instrumentality but the essentially spiritual nature of the work was not forgotten.⁶⁵ Many agreed that what was needed to conquer India for Christ was "godly men and women of wide culture and deep sympathy with the people".⁶⁶ William Goudie

60. Editorial, *Harvest Field* (July 1904), p. 241.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 244

63. F. W. Steinthal, 'The Chief Hindrances to the Spread of the Kingdom of Christ in India', *Harvest Field* (June 1904), p. 217.

64. John Hardy, 'Chief Hindrances', *Harvest Field* (May 1904), p. 183.

65. J. Hudson, 'The Training of Missionaries', *Harvest Field* (September 1894), p. 567.

66. 'Current Mission News', *Harvest Field* (August 1894), p. 553.

called for an improvement in the methods of presenting Christ, "but", he warned, "let us bear in mind that not by dialectic but by spiritual force may we hope to succeed, and therefore let us depend more than ever on the gift and constant help of the Holy Spirit".⁶⁷

By the end of the 19th century the earlier more critical approach toward Hinduism was being replaced by what Jones referred to as "a more rational" attitude.⁶⁸ It recognised that the soldier who fought with fulness of knowledge was an infinitely better warrior than the one whose efficiency was limited to his drill book. "In the warfare we have to wage," concluded Robinson, "it is good to remember the wise old rule, 'Never despise your enemy'. We must know him and lead him a willing captive to the feet of Christ, who alone can redeem and regenerate India."⁶⁹

67. William Goudie, 'The Chief Hindrances to the Extension of the Kingdom of Christ in India', *Harvest Field* (April 1904), p. 134.

68. John P. Jones, 'Hinduism and Christianity'. *Harvest Field* (March 1897), p. 83.

69. W. Robinson, 'Use and Abuse', *Harvest Field* (January 1901), p. 17.

2. Christian Response to some Selected Movements for Social Change in India in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Somen Das

Introduction

In this paper, I would like to examine and evaluate briefly some of the indigenous movements for social change in India in the 19th and 20th centuries. We need to look carefully at the scope and nature of these movements and then reflect on them from a theological-ethical perspective.

The Indian Renaissance

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a restlessness in the Indian reality. The country was in a deplorable condition. There was a "somnolent stupor" in India. The country had become a "Sleeping Leviathan".¹ The society was full of evil customs and superstitions. A certain inertia had set in. The people had become dehumanised and domesticated. They did not realise their condition of oppression—it was the old moribund society with its state of "muteness". In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "The country is dead" and "India is in putrification".² They had lost their self-respect and dignity. The Indian masses had been neglected, ignored and denied their basic human rights. In such a situation, it was realised that somebody was required

1. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Almora, Advaita Ashram Publications, 1947, Vol. I - VII), VI, p. 302.

2. Bhubendranath Datta, *Swami Vivekananda: Patriot-Prophet* (Calcutta, Naba Bharat Publications, 1954), p. ix.

22 *Movements for Social Change*

"to cross the Rubicon of orthodoxy and rejuvenate Hindu society and to give Hinduism a *social purpose*".³ The Indian society of the nineteenth century is very well described in the following words :

A country where millions of people live on flowers of the "mahua" plant and a million or two sadhus and a hundred million or so Brahmins suck the blood out of these poor people...is that a country or hell? Is that a religion or a devil's dance?...Aye in this country of ours the very birth place of the Vedas, our masses have been hypnotised for ages. To touch them is pollution, to sit with them is pollution. Hopeless they were born, hopeless they must remain.⁴

From the beginning of the nineteenth century there was an acute awareness of this deplorable condition. What were the causes of the historical social consciousness which brought about the various movements for social change?

Basically, there are four reasons for the awakening. They were the various missionary movements, British colonialism, English education and the inherent vitality of Hinduism. According to Radhakrishnan, "The Hindu religious revival is partly the result of Western research, partly reaction against Western dominance and partly the revolt against Christian missionary propaganda".⁵ The same reasons could be attributed to the social consciousness of the time. Radhakrishnan put it more positively when he said, "The impact of Christianity

3. K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1953), p. 325.

4. The *mahua* plant is grown in Bengal. It is the poor man's food. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, ibid.* Vol. VI. p. 224-225 and B. Datta, op. cit. p. 3.

5. S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West : Some Reflections* (New York, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1956), p. 108.

brought about a religious awakening among the Hindus".⁶ Natarajan later said, "Fear of Christianity has been the beginning of much social wisdom in India".⁷ Earlier, C. F. Andrews, the great friend of India, had stated, "The East is awake – that is the great new fact, a fact more important than all the commercial rivalries of Europe or the material activities of America".⁸

Scholars account for this process of Hindu resurgence and social consciousness in various ways. Arend Th. van Leeuwen thinks that the "Western influence has acted as a catalyser which precipitates rapid change and fresh combinations within a stable chemical structure".⁹ He thinks that India can take the Christian virus into its system but without allowing itself to be radically affected and transformed thereby. This is a particular perception of the scope and nature of change which has taken place in the country. But we need to look at this view from the perspective of the various movements which we will examine briefly.

In our study of the movements, we will discover that India has been radically affected. But the change has not been disruptive and discontinuous. For this reason, Stephen Hay describes this change as "revitalisation".¹⁰ Latourette called it "mass modification" and Tielhard de Chardin designated it as "Christification". We can also understand this kind of change as a

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6. S. Radhakrishnan, *Fellowship of the Spirit* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 20.
 7. S. Natarajan, *A Century of Social Reform in India* (Bombay, Asian Publishing House, 1962), p. 8.
 8. D. O' Conner, *The Testimony of C. F. Andrews*, (Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1974), p. 135.
 9. Arend van Leeuwen *Christianity in World History: The Meeting of the Faiths of East and West* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964) p. 350.
 10. Stephen N. Hay, *Asia's Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China and India*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1970), p. viii

process guided and controlled by "selective affinity", to use the helpful category of Max Weber. According to him, this is a movement in which certain features of ideational, historical, material, social and personal factors mutually enforce the features that have the greatest desire to unite and thereby bring them into prominence. Another scholar, Ernest Hocking, maintained that the process could be understood in terms of 'reconception', which is a continuous movement taking place by inclusion – by broadening and deepening the base of each religion which is appropriated. This induction leads to a reduction of difference between religions. The purpose of this reconception is to preserve the "unlosable essences".¹¹ We need to know whether a similar analysis could be made of the movements for social change in India.

These are some of the ways in which scholars have tried to explain the changes that have taken place since the beginning of the nineteenth century. They clearly recognise and explicitly acknowledge western impact and missionary influence in this resurgence. Long-lost motifs within Hinduism came alive during this period. Indian scholars began to emphasise those dormant motifs while de-emphasising some of the dominant motifs which had reigned supreme for centuries. As a result they were able to discover or recover social purpose which enabled social change during this period. Consequently, Kesub Chunder Sen put it in his own unique way and gave the clarion call, "Under the banner of Brahmoism, then exert your noble energies, the great Atlantic of difficulty will dry up and the formidable Alps of impediments will melt away under the pressure of heroic perserverance".¹²

11. William Ernest Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith*, (New York, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1940), p. 190-198. See also his *The Coming World Civilization* (Connecticut, Greenwood, 1956), p. 142, 147-150.

12. K. C. Sen, *Social Reformation in India* (Calcutta, Navavidhan Publishing and Committee, 1863), p. 19.

We will look at some of the movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries very briefly and thereby illustrate the kind of social change which is going on in India. We need to find out whether the scholars mentioned rightly assessed the scope and nature of change.

I. Brahmo Samaj

Raja Ram Mohan Roy is known as the Father of the Indian Renaissance and the founder of the Brahmo Samaj. This came into being in 1828 and was one of the early pioneer organisations which systematically and rationally pursued the matter of social service. The Trust Deed of the Samaj advocated the need for social service. In this way, Ram Mohan Roy became the pioneer and prophet of this movement for social change. He became the spokesman and champion of the dumb millions of this country, particularly of Bengal.

His first writing in Persian, entitled *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhaidin* (Gift to Deists) in 1803 was characterised by a radicalism trenchant enough to embarrass many later admirers. In this book he emphasised the criteria of reason and social comfort. He enunciated three simple unitarian truths to enlighten the people. The first was a liberal religion. The second was the idea of social reform in which all known penalised classes were to be elevated through education and the extension of civil rights so that all people could participate fully in the benefits of civilization. Finally, there was the idea of theistic progress or the notion of the perfectibility of human-kind which, according to him, could be best achieved by associating social reform with rational religion. From this it is obvious that Ram Mohan Roy was eager to infuse the ancient religion of Hinduism with a social purpose and thrust and make the former a foundation for the latter.

On this basis, he began to write and work consciously for educational, social and economic reforms. He realised that the

advent of the British Raj in India adversely affected the economy to a great extent. Her various industries like the traditional textile industry, were captured or considerably reduced. The British crippled the industries by fully utilizing the raw materials available in India and subsequently selling the finished products at a high price. They also crippled the salt manufacture within the country by deliberately importing salt from Britain.

Nearly a hundred years later, in 1930 Mahatma Gandhi launched the Salt Satyagraha by marching from Ahmedabad to Dandi. Gandhi was also protesting against the British monopoly of salt which they had crystallised in terms of the Salt Acts. In 1833 Ram Mohan Roy formulated the Charter which categorically stated "to do away with salt tax". He spoke out against the revenue system of the Government by giving evidence in the House of Commons in 1831. This resulted in the reduction of rents which were imposed. This helped the tenants. Reduction was also granted in the level of revenue demanded from the zamindars. Further he argued on behalf of agriculturists on whom a high tax was imposed. As an alternative, he suggested a levy of taxes on luxury goods. He also pleaded for the appointment of Indian revenue officers which was granted later.

With regard to education, he strongly advocated English education rather than the traditional or the conventional Sanskrit type. He asked for the study of chemistry, anatomy and other useful sciences. He wrote about this to Lord Amherst in 1832, but only in 1835 was a policy on education in India stipulated at the initiative of Lord Macaulay. Roy also became the forerunner of women's liberation in India by advocating the abolition of the nefarious practice of sati (widow-burning). Again, only in 1829 was it abolished by law during the time of Lord William Bentinck.

Thirdly, he worked for the freedom of the press in India. In

1823 John Adam took over as acting Governor-General and enacted the license system. He brought the Press Ordinance in March 1823 which was duly approved by the Chief Justice. Ram Mohan Roy reacted to this by appealing against it before the Supreme Court and the King-in-Council in London. Finally, he worked for the reformation of the Jury system. The Supreme Court of India which was established in 1774 excluded Indians. Agitation against this discrimination bore fruit and Wynn introduced the Indian Jury Bill and got it passed by Parliament in May 1826. In this connection he wrote to Mr. Crawford. The petitions and appeals of Ram Mohan Roy were finally taken seriously and his objections were taken care of.

From this cursory glance at the thinking and work of Ram Mohan Roy, it becomes abundantly clear that he not only advocated social change in the name of religion but institutionalised it in terms of the Brahmo Samaj which gave a real impetus for the work.¹³

II. Ramakrishna Movement

Swami Vivekananda, under the impact of Ramakrishna, his education and world-wide travel, started an organised movement to bring about socio-economic changes in his days. Ramakrishna, his guru, did not permit him to go into "Nirvikalpa Samadhi" so that Vivekananda could engage seriously in the task of social uplift of the masses. His disciples thought that Vivekananda had gathered a whirlwind of spiritual rhapsody and ecstasy, and an avalanche of spirituality from

13. Iqbal Singh, *Ram Mohan Roy : A Biographical Enquiry into the Making of Modern India* (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1958); B. N. Dasgupta, *The Life and Times of Raja Ram Mohan Roy* (New Delhi, Ambica Publications, 1980); N. C. Joshi, ed., *Ram Mohan Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (New Delhi, Vikas Publishing, House, 1975); Nalini C. Ganguly, *Raja Ram Mohan Roy* (Calcutta, Y. M. C. A. Publishing House, 1934).

Ramakrishna which enabled him to "shake the world to its foundations".¹⁴

During his extensive travel in India, he became painfully aware of the stark and naked reality of the Indian people. He said :

I have now travelled all over India...But alas, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses...It is for this reason—to find more means for the salvation of the poor of India—that I am going to America.¹⁵

He diagnosed the problem of India very well when he said, "the people are neither Hindus nor Vedantins—they are merely don't touchists, their kitchen is their temple and cooking pots are their objects of worship".¹⁶ During this time he realised the priority for India and advocated, "Educate the masses, give them their rights". For this purpose he was prepared to go to hell so that his vision of new India could become a reality. He began to feel for the people and worked for their awakening through education. As a result of his visit to the West he said :

I have travelled twelve months with this load in my heart and this idea in my head...With a bleeding heart, I have crossed half the world seeking help...I may perish of hunger and cold in this land but I bequeath to you young men this sympathy, this struggle for the poor...¹⁷

He returned to India and on Christmas Day 1899, he established the Ramakrishna Mission and Mutt. Through this insti-

14. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western Disciples* (Almora, Advaita Ashrama Publications, 1960), p. 823.

15. R. Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1960), p. 18.

16. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda* (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1953), p. 131.

17. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples op. cit.*, p. 296.

tution he worked for the masses and practised "Manava dharma". The other monks of the order joined him in this stupendous task. For this he re-interpreted the Vedantic doctrine wherein he showed that social service is intrinsic to Hindu religion. It cannot be a peripheral concern. This became the basis of the work of Ramakrishna Mission. By 1956 there were one hundred and ten centres of the Mission all over the world.

After laying the foundation he began to oppose various evils affecting and afflicting Indian society. He was against caste and untouchability. He said : "In religion there is no caste, the caste system is opposed to the religion of the Vedanta, but caste is simply the outgrowth of the political institution of India, it is a hereditary trade guild".¹⁸ For him this system was opposed to national consciousness. On many occasions he advocated the upsurge of Sudrahood or Sudra Raj. He was very much for individual liberty and worked for "mukti". This alone can be the presupposition of social and political liberty. To him, "No nation and man can attempt to gain physical freedom without mental equality".¹⁹ He believed that this could be done through an extensive educational system for the people. For that reason, the Ramakrishna Mission has established innumerable educational institutions all over India for the uplift of the masses.

Along with this strong social thrust in his words and works, he had a strong sense of political consciousness during the time in which he lived. He is known as the "Spiritual Father of Bengal Nationalism". In conversation between Lokmanya Tilak and Swami Vivekananda, it was agreed that while the former would directly work for nationalism in the political field, Vivekananda would work for the same but in the religious field. Vivekananda's own brother maintains, "The primary

18. Vik Arora, *The Social and Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (1968), p. 46

19. *Ibid.*

object of Vivekananda was nationalism. To arouse the sleeping lion of India and to put it on its proper pedestal was his life's mission. His national ideal was the ideal of Bankim Chunder Chattopadyyaya as depicted in the revolutionary novel, 'Ananda Mat'.²⁰

But in spite of his ardent love of the motherland, he believed that the basis of all systems, social or political, rests upon the goodness of man. In this sense he was fundamentally a gradualist. He believed in an evolutionary process and that national regeneration could come about through "developing personality". At other times he fervently expressed himself along socialist lines. He said, "I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system but a half a loaf is better than no bread".²¹ Obviously, Swami Vivekananda contradicted himself and was in a dilemma. For this reason he did not or rather could not work systematically and rationally for some of the ideas he espoused for socio-political-economic life in India. He believed in a democratic form of government. Economically he believed in a "Proletocult" which sounds more Marxist in character. He did not want the poor to become poorer and the rich richer. Therefore it is not surprising that as early as 1893, in his famous Chicago address at the Parliament of Religions he said, "You Christians who are so fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen—why do you not try to save their bodies from starvation!".²²

Unfortunately he died in 1902 at the young age of thirty-nine without translating many of his dreams into action. But on the whole in his own way, he secularised and socialised Hinduism, making it an effective instrument for the social and political awakening of the people in India.

20. B. Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

21. Binoy K. Roy, *Socio-Political Views of Vivekananda* (New Delhi, People House, 1979), p. 49.

22. Binoy K. Roy, *op cit*, p. 18.

III. Servants of India Society

Now we move to the western part of India where the Servants of India Society came into existence. It was founded in 1905 by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He was very much influenced in his thought and action by people like Madhav Govind Ranade and G. R. Agarkar. Gokhale had joined the Deccan Education Society of Agarkar and Tilak. Ranade had founded the *Sarva-janik Sadha*, which at that time, was the chief political association of India. Gokhale himself was the Secretary of this organisation. Ranade had evoked the "Shivaji spirit" and was the moving force behind the social conference between 1887 and 1900. Ranade was a social reformer who had a tremendous impact on Gokhale.²³ Gokhale was basically a moderate and a realist which became obvious when he said in 1907 :

We are at a stage of the country's progress when our achievements are bound to be small and our disappointments frequent and trying. It will, no doubt, be given to our countrymen of future generation, to serve India by success. We of the present generation, must be content to serve mainly by our failures.²⁴

He illustrated this conviction by the kinds of programmes and reforms which he initiated. He had submitted a scheme of reform called "Gokhale's Political Testament" to Lord Willingdon. Later the Montague-Chelmsford Reform incorporated some of those ideas. He presented the Indian problem very well and understood her plight deeply. In one of his memoranda he stated :

A kind of dwarfing and stunting of the race is going on under the present system of government. We must live all the days of our life in an atmosphere of inferiority and the

23. Dr. J. N. Vajpeyi. *The Extremist Movement in India* (Allahabad, Chug Publications, 1874), p. 37

24. R. C. Mazumdar. *History of the Freedom Movement in India* Vol. 1 (Calcutta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1966). pp. 5-6.

tallest amongst us must bend in order that the exigencies of the system may be satisfied . . . till at last our lot as hewers of wood and drawers of water in our own country is stereotyped.²⁵

Although he was a modest and moderate person, he realised the necessity of social reform going hand in hand with political reform. He realised their reciprocal character. He very much influenced the Morley-Minto Reform of 1909 which asked for constitutional reforms like enlarging the Governor-General's Legislative Council and moving gradually towards self-government institutions. But at that point in history he maintained that the British connection was essential for the well-being of India and even considered it providential. This is where he came into direct confrontation with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who was an extremist.

The debate between the two stalwarts of the time came out in the open through their respective journals—Gokhale edited *Sudharak* and Tilak edited *Kesari*. Gokhale wanted a constitutional method of change, both social and political. He believed in reconciliation and wise compromise with the British government. He gave the slogan, "No taxation without representation". He criticised the Salt Tax and advocated the Indianisation of the public services and education for the people. Such policies were translated into programmes of action by the Servants of India Society. But the temper and mood of the time and context did not allow the organisation much publicity and prominence. It remained confined to the Pune area and did not bear much fruit in terms of social or political change. But we cannot forget the efforts of Gokhale to bring about socio-political-cultural transformation during the early part of this century.

25. Sri P. H. alias Rao Saheb Patwardhana, *Gokhale, the Man and his Mission* (New York, Asia Publishing House, 1966), p. 20,

IV. Non-Brahmin Movement

In this section we will concentrate on what happened in Tamil Nadu. The pioneer and prophet of the non-Brahmin movement for social change is E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, popularly known as "Periyar". The Dravidian Association was formed in Madras in 1910 by Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar. In 1919 the Dravidian Association was changed to "South India Liberal Federation". This brought into being the Justice Party which fought for the non-Brahmins against the domination of the Brahmins. A survey in 1912 showed that there were only 3.2% Brahmins in the Madras Presidency but they occupied 55% of the important positions in the Government.

EVR was an iconoclast from the beginning. He had strong views about the rights of women and was very much averse to caste regulations. He got his niece remarried soon after the death of her husband. In those days enforced widowhood was widely prevalent. In 1924-25 he took an active part in the satyagraha in Vaikom, Kerala. He came to be known as the "Vaikom hero", the title conferred on him by the people as an expression of gratitude in recognition of his successful fight for securing for the untouchables the right to walk on the streets of the Kerala town.

In the beginning of his public career, he worked and gave leadership to the Congress party in Tamil Nadu. He was initiated into the party by men like C. Rajagopalachari and Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu. He even went on to become the Secretary and President of the Congress party in his state. But gradually he became quite disenchanted and disillusioned with the party because of the ascendancy of the Brahmins in it. He became aware of casteism and caste conflict in the party. The parting of ways came at the Conjeevaram session of the Congress party in 1925. In the same year he founded a dynamic social movement called the Self-Respect Movement. It called for a radical change in the religious, social and civil life of the people. The aim of the movement was stated as follows :

A new understanding of the values of life, a genuine feeling of resentment against those who would have the accident of birth accepted as the one and only criterion of personal worth, a sincere recognition of the fact that much that passes for religion and piety is nothing short of gross and grotesque superstitions foisted and feeding upon the ignorance and credulity of the unsophisticated.²⁶

He became a crusader for rationalism which holds the key for development and progress of the country. It is this rational frame of mind which can destroy this caste-ridden society. In his meetings he used to display the following words :

There is no God;
He who invented God is a fool ;
He who preaches God is a rogue,
He who worships God is a barbarian . . .
Caste is a curse which must be abolished ;
To abolish caste, religion must be abolished ;
To abolish religion, God must be abolished.

For EVR to be anti-Brahmin meant being anti-religious and atheistic. He saw an intrinsic relationship between God, religion and caste. He realised that traditional caste-structure dominated by the Brahmins was the root cause of exploitation, inhumanity and slavery of the Indian mass. Consequently he believed and worked fervently for the abolition of the system which would then bring about social liberation and justice. For this reason, of the five foundational principles of the Self-Respect Movement, abolition of God, religion and Brahmin formed three. He repeated them several times in his long life and even in his last lecture in 1971. He had once said that "If you see a snake and a Brahmin, kill the Brahmin first".²⁷

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26. M. M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ* (Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1976), p. 127.
27. Malik, *Dissent, Protest and Reform, in Indian Civilization* (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1977), p. 345.

Such was the resentment he harboured against the Brahmins! It has been rightly noted by Swaminathan, "As Mahatma Gandhi was rousing the political consciousness of the masses, Periyar was awakening the dormant social consciousness of the people of South India".²⁸

EVR started various journals through which he propagated his ideas—*Kudiarasu* (People's Government), *Puratchi* (Revolt), *Pakutharivu* (Discernment), and *Viduthalai* (Liberty). Through these journals he criticised vehemently the Brahmins and Brahminism of the time. He also broke with Gandhi on this issue along with S. Ramanathan. Later EVR identified Gandhi and Congress along with Hinduism and Brahminism which should be abolished in the name of non-Brahmin's self-respect. For him self-respect is prior to self-rule. Scholars like Irschick and Barnett have taken note of his extreme radicalism and absolute commitment to change in India.²⁹ He was strongly opposed to child-marriage, the dowry system and enforced widowhood. He even went to the extent of advocating the abolition of marriage itself. The most effective weapon of mass education about the dispensibility of the Brahmin priests in crucial functions, was the self-respect marriages. This became a mass movement in Tamil Nadu and a means of mass education and action for social change.

He founded the Dravida Kazhagam in 1944 by converting the Justice Party. C. N. Annadurai's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam came into existence as an off-shoot of the D. K. in 1949. Both parties were opposed to caste and managed to oust the Brahmin Chief Minister of the time, C. Rajagopalachari. Both parties continued for a long time to battle against social evils and economic disparities. This Movement made quite a departure from the three Movements we dealt with earlier. Both Raja Ram

28. Swaminathan, *Karunanidhi* (New Delhi, East-West Press, 1974) p. 7.

29. Eugene F. Irschick : *Politics and Social Conflicts in South India 1916-1929* (Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1969); M. R. Barnett *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India* (Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 38.

Mohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda re-interpreted Hinduism and made this modified Hinduism a basis for socio-economic transformation. But EVR had not only become anti-Brahmin and an atheist but a communist. He was of the opinion that religion, particularly Brahminism, was a positive hindrance to social change. Secondly, as against the previous three movements, EVR's movement was very radical and revolutionary in character.

V. The Dalit Movement

This movement is in continuity with EVR'S movement, in its radicality and its particularity. It indicates our deep social malaise. The organisation comprises people from the Untouchable jatis whom Gandhi designated as "Harijans". Discrimination and consequent deprivation has persisted to this day in India. For centuries a vast section of our people has been marginalised and domesticated. Previously they were referred to as "Mlechhas" or outcastes. In 1932 they were called "Depressed Classes". Dr. Ambedkar, the Father of the Indian Constitution, was himself an Untouchable and preferred the terms "Protestant Hindus" or "Non-Conformist Hindus" for the group.

The Dalit Panthers stand within the revolutionary tradition of Mahatma Phoolley and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Jotirao Phoolley has been called the "Father of the Indian Social Revolution". In the 19th century he started his movement for the education of untouchable girls and demanded radical reorganisation of Hindu society on the basis of individual liberty and social equality. He fought a relentless battle against Brahmins through many activities and writings. He called his organisation *Satya Sodhak Samaj*. Dr. Ambedkar assumed the leadership of the revolt of the Depressed Classes in 1920's. He began to write about it in his paper called *Mook Nayak* and founded the "Bahiskhrita Hitakarini Sabha". He said that the caste system deadens, paralyses and cripples the people. It

has ruined the Hindu race and has destroyed, demoralised and devitalised the Hindu Society.³⁰ But he discovered to his utter dismay that at the root of the Hindu social system lies the Dharma which is prescribed in the Manusmriti. Therefore he thinks that we have to destroy such a religion if we are to abolish the caste system. Like Periyar and Phoolley, Ambedkar blamed the Brahmins for the condition of slavery obtaining in society. Once Dr. Ambedkar wrote to Gandhi about temple entry: "If the Hindu religion is to be a religion of social equality, then an amendment of its code to provide temple entry is not enough. What is required is to purge it of its doctrine of chaturvarna".³¹

From this perspective, the Dalit Movement preferred the British rule to Brahmin rule, but later Ambedkar realised that only within a free state would it be possible to work for political power for the group. After Independence he wanted to conceive of democratic nationalism in terms of anti-Brahminism. In 1936 Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party on the fundamental assumptions that Brahminism and Capitalism are the twin enemies of the working class in India. He was closer to the Communists than the Congress Party. But he was also disappointed with the Communist Party because he realised the omniscient character of Brahminism. Dr. Ambedkar, like Phoolley, emphasised mass education and direct action to restore the self-respect of the untouchables. He realised that a power struggle was necessary.

In recent times, the Father of the Dalit Movement is Shyam Sunder, who is a follower of Dr. Ambedkar. Sunder organised the party called "Bhim Sena". It came into existence in 1968 and was made up of militant and dedicated youth of scheduled caste origin. Sunder, like his worthy predecessors, wrote a book called *Mool* in which he advocated that they were the

30. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar-Life and Mission* (Bombay, Popular Prakasham, 1954), p. 261.

31. *Ibid.* p. 261.

original inhabitants of India. He thought of alliance with the Muslims. His demands were : surrender of 25% of the villages in each taluk with which they could form "Dalitstan" within India; a separate electorate, a separate scheduled caste university, and a strong political organisation for the untouchables. The Dalit Panthers emerged as a force in 1972. But unfortunately, in Karnataka this movement for radical change has broken up into Dalit Sangarsha Samiti (mainly of the intellectual Harijans) and the Dalit Action Committee (mainly of politically minded Harijans). Like the Anti-Brahmin Movement, the Dalit Movement is demanding a radical and revolutionary structural change within the Indian society. Only then will socio-economic changes be possible. They have maintained a very militant stand even till today as is evidenced in their regular journal called *Dalit Voice*.³²

VI. Peasants' Movement

Today all over India there are movements for the liberation of the peasants who have been caught in the clutches of landlords and money-lenders for centuries. We must realise that India is still primarily rural and agricultural in character. Bonded labour, child labour and landless labour are widely prevalent. They are constantly discriminated against and exploited by ruthless landlords. In this sense our society continues to be semi-feudal and semi-colonial in character. The vast majority of the Indian population belongs to this agrarian sector. Yet it is the most unorganised sector of the country without much collective bargaining power. Entrenched reactionary forces and lot of vested interests have prevented poor farmers in particular from coming together to fight for their own cause. Consequently they are disorganised and without direction. But increasingly they are forming themselves into groups in different states to improve their conditions.

32. Published by Dalit Sahitya Academy, 109/71h Cross, Palace Lower Orchards, Bangalore-3.

We will now look at some of the peasant movements, which have taken place after Independence. We can define a peasant movement as a "relatively organized and continuous collective action involving violence, or the threat of violence, for securing more share in the control or ownership of land and its produce and to abolish injustices which have arisen thereof".³³ In Bengal, at Naxalbari the agrarian system of jotedari-adhiars was prevalent. This is a semi-feudal system where the adhiars or cultivators are under the complete jurisdiction of the jotedars or landlords, known as zamindars in other parts of India. The adhiars either were not paid for the work done or a meagre sum was given to them. With the system of share-cropping, more deductions were made on what the adhiari received. Thus what he actually took home was grossly insufficient for his minimum needs. In such an oppressive condition, people like Kanu Sanyal raised the slogan of "land to the tiller" or "the one who owns the plough owns the land".

Gradually the poor peasants became politicised and became members of *Krishak Sabha*, which was indirectly affiliated to the Communist Party of India. 1951-1954 was the organizational phase during which time peasantry of Naxalbari advanced through clashes; between 1954-1957 the worker-peasant alliance was achieved and between 1957-1962 the party was able to formulate and carry out its programmes designed to restore land to the tiller.

During this time, a rift developed in the leadership of the movement. Compared with Kanu Sanyal, Charu Mazumdar was more militant and wanted an armed revolt to liberate the peasants from this oppressive and exploitative system. The actual Naxalite peasant uprising took place in March-April 1967. During this time, there were more than a hundred cases of forcible cultivation, dehoarding and confiscation of

33. M. S. A. Rao, *Social Movements in India*, Vol. I (New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 1978), p. 96.

paddy stocks from the jotedars. During this period the peasants' revolt took the form of guerilla warfare and aimed at the seizure of state power. Thus the Naxalite Peasants' Movement became a political party called C.P.I. (Marxist-Leninist) which was quite militant and violent in character. This movement essentially became a class struggle.³⁴

In the Telengana area of Andhra Pradesh, the Andhra Mahasabha was formed in 1930 to fight the evils of our agrarian system. The Razakars came into being demanding land to the tiller. In April 1951, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, following Gandhian principles and strategy, started the Bhoodan Movement to solve the problems of the peasants. Some rich farmers in the Telengana area donated land to him which he distributed to the poor peasants. He and his followers took the risk and walked through the terrifying areas and as a result they were able to win the hearts of many hard-core people. It is reported that during one of the prayer meetings,

the local Harijans requested Bhave's assistance for obtaining some land for cultivation. The request of the Harijans made Vinobaji realise the importance of the problem of land in any effort to drive the peasants and labourers away from the path of violence. Instantaneously, he immediately requested his audience to come forward with bhoodan to the Harijans. One rich farmer by the name of Ramachandra Reddi announced a donation of hundred acres of land. Encouraged by his response Vinobaji took up the Bhoodan movement and spread it all over the country... Later Oomen rightly said that the Telengana peasant revolt provided the womb to the non-violent Bhoodan movement.³⁵

There have been similar peasants' movements in Tamil Nadu

34. B. Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movements* (New Delhi, Allied Publishers, 1974), p. 3.

35. M. S. A. Rao, *Social Movements*, p. 164.

and Karnataka which it is not possible for me to narrate here. But the above two examples of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal illustrate for us the nature and scope of the peasants' movements in India.

We may indicate here some of the recurring problems we face with regard to movements which we have described in this paper but with a particular reference to this peasants' movement. The first issue that we need to raise is how far these movements have a mass base and whether there is enough peasant-worker solidarity. Secondly, the issue of leadership needs to be raised with regard to these movements. Urban-based leadership, with its sophisticated ideology, claims superior knowledge and status. Such leadership insists that others in the movement follow the direction that they give. In the meantime, the rural-based or indigenous leadership is undermined although it may be more democratic than urban-based one, involving the largest possible number of people. Very often such leadership becomes elitist in nature and hierarchical in its functioning. This creates a dichotomy between the leader and the mass. This is where much of the effectiveness and efficacy of these movements are destroyed. This problem was precipitated between the leadership of Kanu Sanyal and of Charu Mazumbar.

Results of these movements

What has been the result of all this? In terms of actual movements, the Brahmo Samaj has lost its social thrust. The Servants of India Society flourished in the context of national independence and once that cause was won, the society became a spent force. But the rest of the movements are flourishing. The Peasants' Movement is especially significant because it crosses caste-lines.

In general we have the Dharmic principle in India on which everything is held together. According to this, there cannot be a complete break with the past. There must be continuity.

As a result, a lot of wrong things from the past still exist and are perpetuated. But this principle may be useful in the sense that those who have worked for a complete overturning of the system have provoked a strong backlash. Extremists produce an extreme backlash. Extremism does not produce organic growth which people can understand. It imposes change from outside rather than develops change from within. Education and organization for change must come gradually. We pay a high price for it, but so do those societies who have experienced rapid change at the cost of ecological pollution, environmental collapse and social disintegration. Instead we must take people into our confidence and educate them and then introduce a more organic and permanent process of change. Otherwise people will go on with their own biases, prejudices and traditions and there will be strong resistance and reaction.

Such a gradual process will also ensure stability in a world of increasing instability at a social, personal and family level. The ancient seers of India perceived a power in the universe, Dharma, which is holding things together, and preventing chaos and disaster. In western philosophy this is described as "natural law". The concern of the Indian sages was to conform to this Dharma and so ensure stability. But it is true that in the name of stability a lot of social and economic exploitation was tolerated.

The ancient seers also spoke of *niskama karma*—a disinterested discharge of duty. We must avoid feverish, mindless activity without reflection. The seers taught that we should act but not be too excited or caught up with the success, fruits or failures of our action. Our problem in the world is mindless activism—of activity without the development of other aspects of humanity.

These two Indian concepts are important to me in the context of these movements for socio-economic political change.

Theological and ethical reflection

The theological and ethical issues on which we need to reflect are—first the class and caste character of these movements. Today Indian Society cannot be analysed only on the basis of caste. We need the caste-class analysis. Secondly the secular/religious character of these movements needs to be examined. How far were some movements like EVR (Periyar's) movement truly secular and how far are they a reaction to the kind of sacredness being practiced? Thirdly there is a rising call for structural change. The Brahmo Samaj did not work for structural change. But by the time we come to the Dalit Movement we see a definite strong thrust for systemic change. Related to this is the fourth point which is the question of whether changes should be evolutionary or revolutionary. Fifthly should change be violent or non-violent? Sixthly how should change be related to continuity? For example when you say "modernization", do you mean "westernization" or does it incorporate the old in a critical and creative way. The sociologist M. N. Srinivas speaks of "Sanskritization" for incorporating the old in modernization which is happening in India.

Seventh what kind of change is called for in the Bible? The Bible and especially the New Testament calls for a structural change which does not merely tamper with reality but gets to the root of the problems and makes changes. Jesus Christ gives a call not for individualistic, inner and spiritual change, but an inner-outer, spiritual-material change focused in the vision of the kingdom of God. The God whom we believe is not cut off from the world but came into the world, was born in the world and lived among us. He was concerned with whole of human reality and all of human life (Jn. 10:10).

Finally, what are our affirmations about God, humans and the world? Our God is an incarnational (relational) Emmanuel God. He does not hide away somewhere, so that we have to go in search of him. But rather he comes to us and in his coming we become human. So his coming is our becoming. As Chris-

tians we therefore have to believe that change is possible. We have to affirm this in our context which is so determined by fatalism that we think life is once for all fixed and rigid and that we only need to conform to it and not transform it. This fatalism is killing us. Today's heresy in the church is fatalism in the name of Jesus Christ. We do not believe in change. We throw up our hands in despair and cry out "What can we do?" while Jesus says "Behold I make all things new". God wants us to work for a new heaven and a new earth.

From this perspective, the first article of faith for me is *change is possible*. The second article is to go beyond that and say that *change is necessary*. Thirdly we must *work for change* and not just think it will take place by fiat.

It is in this Christian spirit we need to express our solidarity with these movements for change wherever they are leading to the approximation of the kingdom of God. But we must be ready to play a prophetic role within these movements by involving ourselves wholeheartedly but with discernment (Rom. 12.2).

3.

Contemporary Hinduism and Evangelical Christianity

P. Nagaraja Rao

Introduction

Hinduism is such a vague term today that at least two aspects are presented to our mind. There is the Hinduism of the common man and the Hinduism of the modern liberal Hindu who has been touched by the Christian religion, modern English education, scientific knowledge and the advancement of technology. The generation of reformed Hinduism began under the impact of the forces of thinkers from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Radhakrishnan who were influenced by modern education and were students of Christianity in the large sense of the term. They have added their own input to improve and reinterpret Hinduism. The man who gave the greatest shake to Hinduism was Mahatma Gandhi. He said there are two types of Hinduism—the Hinduism of stocks and stones, devils and demons, and the Hinduism of the Yoga Sūtras and Bhagavad-gītā. It is the latter Hinduism to which the modern Hindu subscribes.

What is Hinduism ?

Hinduism is the living religion of the Hindus, based on the philosophical tenets of the Vedānta philosophy in one form or other. The term Hindu originally had a territorial significance. It implied residence within a geographical area—the land called Bhārat, the area confined between the Himalayas and the seas. The name Hinduism for the religion was given by the Persians to those who lived in the district near the river Indus.

Hinduism deduces its religious doctrines and moral ideals from the Vedas. It expressly holds the view that concepts like God, creation, soul salvation, Dharma, etc., are derived on the authority of the Vedas revealed to the ancient rishis (sages). The Vedas are declared to be not composed by any human being, not even by God. The Veda is eternal and is present in the mind of the Lord, revealed in each age for the spiritual uplift of mankind. The truths revealed by the Vedas are not open to reasoning or perception. They are affirmed on the authority of the śruti.

The Vedānta philosophy in its absolutistic and theistic form is based on these Triple Texts – the last portion of the Vedas is the Upaniṣads; the key to their synthesis is the Brahma Sūtras; the condensed quintessential version of the two is the Bhagavadgītā, the inset in the great epic Mahābhārata, VI parvan chapters 25 to 42 (700 verses). To put it in Aristotelian form, the Upaniṣads constitute the major premise, the Brahma Sūtras constitute the minor premise, and the conclusion is the Bhagavadgītā.

All the schools of Vedānta derive their doctrines, their theological creed, their codes of morals, their way and view of life from these Triple Texts (Prasthāna-trayī). The Vedānta philosophy is not an independent, intelligently cogitated system of thought based on pure reason alone. It is based on *Faith* in the revealed texts and such other scriptures that elaborate the truths enshrined in the Vedas – the laws of Manu, Yajñavalkya and Parāśara (smṛtis), the two great epics the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, the Dharma Sūtras and the Dharma Śāstras (codes of conduct, rules of administration and laws of expiation). The great distinction between Indian philosophical thought and western philosophical thought is that in Indian philosophy there is no Plato, Socrates, Descartes or Kant who analyses experience. The western philosophers did not expound on texts. Indian philo-

sophy is not all philosophy, it is also a religion. By philosophy I mean intellectual interpretation of reality, analyzing experience. Indian philosophy is a religious philosophy.

The three āchāryas Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva have built three different schools of Vedānta on the bases of the Triple Texts and the allied literature. It is bewildering to many that the Triple Texts should yield three mutually exclusive rival systems of Vedānta. The reason for the differences lies in the flexibility of the Sanskrit language. Each interprets it in a different way. The followers of all the schools of Vedānta call themselves Hindus and name their religion as Hinduism. Whatever the philosophical differences are, yet the Hindus while subscribing to the different schools of Vedānta hold on to the title of being Hindus.

Common way of life

In spite of the differences between them there are a number of doctrines on which they make a common cause. For Hinduism is not a view of life but a way of life. As a way of life people agree. For example, while Śaṅkara holds that the ultimate philosophical tenet is to realise the identity of the individual soul with Brahman, he also agrees that a code of morality and a creed are tenable, necessary and valid for human life. These can be called Hindu ethics and Hindu religion.

The Hindu believes in the existence of a plurality of souls that are eternal and uncreated, held in bondage, tied down to a body of lust and the lure of power, suffering from ignorance, forgetting the Supreme Personality, the Lord, living a life of unbridled, uninhibited indulgence in passions and in the acquisition of enormous wealth in unlawful ways to enable this indulgence. The soul in bondage identifies himself with the body. The soul is not the body, not the senses, not the intellect, not the kośas (sheaths) nor all of them put together. It is that which makes all of them work, and whose exit will render them inoperative.

That souls are many is proved by the many diverse functions and activities of different men at one and the same time. While one marries, others die. There is a wedding at one place and birth at another; activity at one place and idleness at another. While one person snores another works. The plurality of souls is proved by the data of experience. There is no simultaneous experience for all of us at any time.

The souls in bondage do not know the Lord, his majesty, and his infinite compassion. Inebriated by their advances in science and technology, they deny the Lord and play such fantastic tricks before high Heaven as makes the angels weep. The individual all the time indulges in "God-eclipsing activities" imagining that he will never die. Most of us live as if we have a thousand years to stay here. We loiter here and there, perspire after impossible longings by adopting fair and at times foul means. We fill our days with endless titillation of the senses and pleasure and put off the effort to attain enduring happiness and bliss. We imagine that our days will never end. We forget to see how swiftly the sun moves towards his setting every day while the work on hand remains incomplete.

What relevance has this doctrine about the soul to life? G. K. Chesterton gave an insightful remark about the place of religious dogma in life. "The sun is the one created thing which one cannot look at. It is the one thing in the light of which one looks at everything else. Like the sun at the noon-day, mystery explains everything by its own invisibility. Detached intellectualism is all moonshine, for it is light without heat, it is secondary light reflected from a dead world." Likewise a dogma or a tenet affirmed by the Vedas appears as a mystery only when you look at it directly. It is behind us like a light that falls on the object before us, which stands out clearly. Dogmas shed light on other problems but cannot be looked at directly.

The Law of Karma

Another important doctrine subscribed to by the Hindus is the law of Karma. The law of Karma states that nothing is unimportant and nothing is uncaused. From the movements of the atoms to the happenings in history, a definite law governs our life. The Lord is not only the master of our physical order but also of the moral order. One reaps what one sows. There is no dark destiny that governs our lives. Our own acts do it. One human life is too short for the development of human personality. The individual is given a number of chances to develop his spiritual growth. The universe is so constructed as to reward good and punish evil.

The law of Karma affirms a person's freedom and makes him responsible for his acts. It is the moral law of causation. God is exonerated from the charge of partiality and cruelty. The law rules out the concept of a chance universe and makes it a moral theatre. Our efforts are not lost. We carry them into our next life. It fills us with confidence. It fills the human mind with hope and takes away the sting of death and the fear of the grave. As the old adage has it,

Sow a thought, reap an act,
Sow an act, reap a habit,
Sow a habit, reap a character,
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

The law of Karma is not fatalism. It takes note both of people's limitations and potentialities. There is provision for both human effort and determined facts. A person's acts are partly determined, not by an cosmic destiny or force but by their disposition.

Yajñavalkya writes that Karma is not fate.

Fortune comes to those persons who are energetic like lions, but cowards think that it is all the gift of fate. Let

us overcome fate by our power and personal endeavours. No blame will attach to us if our best efforts do not succeed. The truth of the matter is that success in life depends on both our present personal endeavour and past deeds, which are determined. Just as a chariot cannot move on one wheel, fate without personal effort cannot lead to success.

Modern Hindus point out that this is not fatalism. They claim that Christian thinkers crudely and cruelly misinterpret the doctrine of Karma.

Moksa

Hindu social philosophy presents an integrated outlook, spiritually oriented towards the realisation of a state of existence called mokṣa. Mokṣa is the master value of Hinduism. It is a state of existence described as full of bliss, free from all stress and tension, with no disbeliefs and all doubts dispelled. Once the soul attains mokṣa, there is no return to the world of births and deaths (samsāra). Human life is moral theatre to achieve mokṣa. Art, music, wealth, rituals, scriptures and everything are all for the sake of mokṣa. Mokṣa is the end value and all others are means values.

The first two means values (possessions and passions) are necessary for human life. They should not be pursued as ends in themselves. Then they turn out to be disvalues and not aspirations. Possessions and passions must be acquired and indulged in without contravening the principles of social justice (Dharma).

Dharma

Dharma is the moral value, the golden word in Hindu ethics within whose confines the ethical teachings of the classical poets, contemplative saints, wise administrators, and great rulers are enshrined. Transgression of Dharma brings ruin to men,

social obloquy, sin and even death. Dharma is looked upon as the regulating value that upholds society from going to pieces. The Lord in the *Gītā* says, "He is that desire which does not contravene the principle of Dharma". Possessions and passions are not to be allowed to hold sway and direct the lives of men in an uninhibited manner resulting in anti-social activities for the fulfilment of selfish indulgence. Sri Aurobindo observes that we should not allow possessions and passions to hold us, but we must hold them in our power.

Tradition

Contemporary Hinduism neither discards tradition nor disowns science. It fuses tradition and experiment. From the time of Ram Mohan Roy down to Dr. Radhakrishnan, Hinduism is presented in a modern garb. Gandhiji observes, "there are two Hinduisms ; there is the hideous, distorted, inhuman Hinduism with the rigid caste systems and its ugly pendant untouchability ; superstitious worship of stocks and stones ; animal sacrifices, child marriage and enslavement of women. The second type is the Hinduism of the *Gītā*, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Yoga Sūtras*." Gandhiji, Tagore, Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, Vinoba Bhave and Aurobindo, to mention the leading ones, have interpreted the Hinduism of the second type. They have fought against the caste system, and pleaded for the removal of untouchability and for the equality of men and women. They have introduced a great deal of social reconstruction and reform in Hinduism.

The educated section influenced by science and modern thought has accepted the reformist thinkers. The orthodox section which holds to the letter of the *Veda* and its authority looks upon the reforms as deviations. The modern Hindu is a schizophrenic. He adopts orthodox ways of life at home and professes the Hinduism of the reformists as his true religion. He eloquently declares that from the sacrificial altars, we must carry not smoke but fire. We must not make a fetish of the old

but take inspiration from the old. He loudly declares with Vivekananda that "we must cease to look upon every little village superstition as a mandate of the Vedas". This situation has led to the strange predicament that most of the social and religious legislation abolishing inequalities has merely remained on the statute book and not taken root in the lives of people in society. For example in marriage most would not marry outside their caste. The educated Hindu is prevented by some kind of inhibition from disowning tradition.

Contemporary Hinduism at the hands of the reformers has been considerably influenced by the humanitarian work carried on by Christian missionaries in hospitals, educational institutions, charity homes and orphanages. The influence is perceptible in the Ramakrishna Mission. The Hindus did not learn such practical ethics from these Christian institutions. Practical ethics were present in the Hindu scriptures but remained neglected in Hindu thought for a long time.

For Hindu India was seven hundred years under Islamic rule and one hundred and fifty years under British rule. So the Hindus had to protect themselves and in doing so became more withdrawn and individualistic. The individual sought his own individual salvation and did not care for the community. Community concern was awakened in the Hindu by Christians. Christians must continue to point out that the individual does not live without the community.

Toleration

Contemporary Hindu thinkers agree that proselytisation is not necessary. Each must grow in his own faith. The missionary must vitalise the faith in which others live and not transplant them into another religion, which deprives them of the innermost joys of their life. Gandhi said that the role of the Christian missionary is to vitalize the faith in which I am but not to convert me.

Anthropologists hold forced conversion to be a serious malady, worse than death itself. Taking this stand, contemporary Hindu thinkers describe their religion as catholic in outlook, absolutely tolerant of others' views, helpful to men at all stages and concrete in its suggestions. They declare that all religions are alternate paths to reach God. Hence toleration is absolutely necessary. It is not a stroke of policy but a deep article of their faith.

Contemporary Hindu thinkers who lean on the Advaita of Śāṅkara (which is only one school of Vedānta, and not the entire philosophy of the Hindus) opine that the different religions are alternate approaches to one and the same spiritual goal. They plead for the fellowship of faith and the fundamental oneness of reality. The differences in the forms and doctrines enumerated by different religions arise from the fact of the differences in the intellectual, temperamental, and emotional diversities in man's dispositions. All roads lead to Rome. Most of the contemporary Hindu thinkers uphold this type of liberal Hinduism. They plead for toleration and denigrate proselytisation.

Some European savants, who are in love with this aspect of catholic Hinduism are opposed to the *unipersonal* descriptions of ultimate Reality. They plead for the *multi-personal approach* to reality. Hence they are opposed to all types of fundamentalism. In his Gifford Lectures A. J. Toynbee writes :

I have come back to a belief that religion holds the key to the mystery of existence; but I have not come back to the belief that this key is in the hands of my ancestral religion exclusively. ...

The Indian religions are not exclusive-minded. They are ready to allow that there may be alternative approaches to the mystery; I feel sure that in this they are right, and that

this catholic-minded Indian religious spirit is the way of salvation for all religions in an age in which we have to learn to live as a single family, if we are not to destroy ourselves. ¹

The mood of the contemporary Hindu thinker is to discover the area of agreement among the different religions and not stress their differences. The area of agreement is the essence of religion and the rest is mere husk. There is no point in pounding the husk leaving the grain. They want us to be good winnowers to retain the good grain and not sieves to reject the good things.

Many an orientalist is fascinated with this tolerant Hinduism which pleads for the fellowship of faiths and rules out competitive indoctrination and forced or persuasive proselytisation. Writing about Hinduism, the French orientalist Louis Renou says,

The troubles of the present age which are rightly or wrongly attributed to Western materialism, have helped to increase the prestige of Hinduism. Some people see it as the authentic survival of a tradition, or rather, of one tradition, and make it the basis of their philosophia perennis. Others try to incorporate in it a universal religious syncretism.

Whether these attempts will succeed must be left for the future to decide. The fact remains that Hinduism provides an incomparable field of study for the historian of religion: its aberrations are many, but there is in it a great stream of mystical power; it manifests all the conceptions of religion, and its speculation is continually revealing them in a new light. It combines power of constant renewal with a power of conservancy of fundamental tradition.²

1. Arnold J. Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion* (London, Oxford University Press, 1956).

2. Louis Renou, *Religions in Ancient India* (London, Athlone Press, 1953, p. 110).

Liberal Hinduism which looks upon ultimate Reality as indeterminate is accepted by only one section of the Hindus. A large section of Hindu humanity looks upon Supreme Reality as the Transcendental God, omniscient, omnipotent, creator, destroyer, preserver and bestower of secular benefactions and spiritual liberation. Rāmānuja, Madhva, Vallabha, Nimbārka, Caitanya, and other theistic leaders of religion look upon the Nārāyana and Kṛṣṇa as their Gods.

A section of the Śaivaites looks upon Supreme Reality as Rudra and worship him as the harbinger of all secular and spiritual benefits.

There is mutual criticism between the theistic Hindus and the Śāṅkaraite Hindus. The latter admit and accord the status of a relative reality to all the categories affirmed and postulated by the theists. There is agreement in respect of the acceptance of the doctrine of Karma and Rebirth, rituals as purificatory measures, the necessity of the cultivation of ethical qualities, for the practice of Bhakti, for the living of life according to the behests of Dharma, not contravening it in our acquisition of wealth and indulgence of passions.

Hindu reformers

Modern Hindu reformers plump for the cause of fellowship among faiths and tolerance with one another. Most of the reformers plead for the abolition of the caste system based on birth. When Gandhi was trying to remove untouchability, he used to preach to the pandits. The pandits told him that the śāstras do not teach the removal of untouchability. He replied that if the śāstras do not teach them, they are not śāstras. Some of them strive for scriptural support for the removal of untouchability, equality between man and woman, abolition of child marriage and removal of the disabilities of women. They regard Mahatma Gandhi as the chief proponent of liberal Hinduism. They have made tolerance the chief virtue of the

Hindu spirit. They spell out their creed in Christian forms : all men are brothers; there cannot be happiness for any of us until it is won for all; self-realisation is impossible without identifying ourselves with the least and the last in society and serving them.

Highlighting the evils of our age, Gandhiji chooses seven points for drastic reform: politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice. These seven evils should go from all religions. Modern Hindu reformers have assiduously addressed themselves to the removal of the evils by institutional work and individual initiative.

Orthodox Hindus swear by the Vedas and do not approve of these deviations. Even the cultivated Hindu is slow to disown traditional and Vedic ways of life and he is not willing to discredit science.

The Christian influence on Hindu religion has been there from the time of Saint Thomas roughly 2000 years ago. It has influenced and awakened the modern Hindu to the feeling that religion should express itself in behaviour and active service. Modern Hinduism does not seek to bypass morality. It insists on universal welfare which has been the common prayer of all saints, without ruling out any section as heathens or barbarians.

Among them *Sri Aurobindo*, who had the benefit of western education and a long stay in London has evolved a system of philosophy called the Integral Yoga which he finds clicks well with the spirit of the Vedas. He opposes Śaṅkara tooth and nail and gives the supreme ontological status to our life on earth and the universe. He says it is neither illusory nor relatively real as the Advaitins hold, nor is it merely a wayside inn for us to stay on the journey to heaven, to hasten as early as possible

from its trammels and imperfections to liberation. He says we must attain divinity here.

The specific contribution of Aurobindo is to give an ontological status to the world. He says "The world is good". *Saṁsāra* is a succession of spiritual opportunities. Here you must make your life. He does not agree with Advaita that the world is unreal. We must divinize it and bring the kingdom of God here. He seeks to divinize human life and looks upon human life (*Saṁsāra*) as a succession of spiritual opportunities. This is his original contribution, which checks the usual other-worldly attitudes of the Hindus which argue that since we are in the world for only a little while, we should not concern ourselves with the inequalities of human life.

Ramana Maharishi calls us back to the path of inquiry, fundamentally adumbrated by Śaṅkara and realizing the identity of the individual soul with Brahman.

The Ramakrishna and Vivekananda Movement is an active Hindu force. Because of its adherence to Śaṅkara it regards all faiths as fellow travellers equal in worth in the eyes of God. So they find it difficult to oppose Christian work of conversion. They do humanitarian work on a large scale.

Dayananda Sarasvati who bases his religion on the Vedas believes in sacrifices and looks upon Hinduism as a proselytising religion, which can take in others also through conversion. This movement has brought in men belonging to other faiths into Hinduism.

Professor Radhakrishnan believes that the future unifying religion of the world which will ring in peace and amity among nations and perfect integration for individuals is to be ushered into existence. He called it, "The World's Unborn Soul" in his inaugural address at Oxford.³ He concludes his book

3. 'The World's Unborn Soul' inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford. 20th October, 1936, published in S. Radhakrishnan *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (London, Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 1-34.

*Recovery of Faith*⁴ with a quotation from Lawrence Hyde, "Amidst all the conflict and confusions, the sympathetic observer can trace the merging outlines of a new form of religion.....What may prove to be the ground plan of the temple in which our spiritual descendants are destined to worship".⁵

A section of the Hindus believes that Hinduism has grown through the ages. It is a self-sufficient indigenous religion. Imbibing this outlook, they are opposed to Christianity and Islam. They treat these religions as alien cults which as such have no place in India. They are not working at full speed, because of the secular nature of the Indian constitution. An extreme section of India's political leaders has held the view that India is Hindu India. The liberal Hindu believes that Hinduism is a composite religion, not a unitary one. They describe the development of Hinduism as that of a living organism, which absorbs what is good for it and grows. Hinduism is not dead creed with once for all settled doctrines, admitting no growth. Modern Hinduism has absorbed the best in Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam. It is a living religion. It is like a bicycle, which is stable because it keeps moving. This living nature of Hinduism has made it strong with life, and exhibits a strange vitality and a living power all its own. It is this all-absorbing nature of Hinduism that made the late western savant Annie Besant, the unwearied experimentalist of all religions, embrace Hinduism and say, "make no mistake. Without Hinduism India has no future. Hinduism is the soil into which India's roots are struck and torn out of that she will inevitably wither as a tree torn out of its place."

4. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 203.

5. Lawrence Hyde, *'The Wisdom of Religion Today'* (Burning-Glass Paper No. 13), pp. 44 ff quoted in E.C. Dewick, *The Christian Attitude to other Religions* (1955), p. 19.

Liberal Hindus who have been influenced by western thought and who have reflected on the advances in technology and science feel that it is not enough if distances are bridged, currencies linked, and commerce made international. They feel the unification of the will of man is necessary but such unification of the world will result only from a sound religion. Professor Radhakrishnan concluded his Beatty Memorial Inaugural series in the USA with the hope that

Mankind stems from one origin, from which it has figured out in many forms. It is now striving towards the reconciliation of that which has been split up. The separation of East and West is over. The history of the new world, the one world has begun. It promises to be large in extent, varied in colour and rich in quality.⁶

The contemporary Hindu leaders look upon Hinduism as a growth religion. It is not country without a capital, nor is it a formless lump of creeds and sects with no central doctrines to hold them. It is a citadel with a ring of outworks, intricate but inter-related. The outworks are being added to and altered from time to time.

Contemporary Hinduism and Evangelical Christianity

Evangelicals must point out this schizophrenic behaviour of contemporary Hindus whereby so many good reforms are on the statute books and are not practiced in society. They should ask: "You profess such noble ideals. Why are you not practicing them?" Christian workers who are bold and do not want favours should meet some of these big men and ask them how they reconcile these things.

For the common Hindu, evangelicals should make him feel that religion is not merely getting something from God. Rather he should be transformed into a new life. The trouble is that

6. S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West Some Reflections* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1955) p. 131.

people want to become rich quickly and become religious without being moral. We should never forget that the Galilean did not travel one hundred miles from his own home, yet today one in three people in the non-communist world is a Christian. His effect is due to self-sacrifice and love. That is what evangelicals must show. The one implacable influence of Christianity on the Hindu people is to encourage them to do some practical service. Christianity has had more influence in India than Buddhism. Buddhism was forced out of India. But the entire practical work of the Ramakrishna Mission and Dayananda's thoughts on conversion and integral yoga have all developed under the impact of Christianity. The average Hindu has not rejected Christianity. He does not understand it.

Karma theory and the Christian doctrine of forgiveness

The average man does not think that evil that befalls them is accidental. He cannot accuse God because he loves God. So, he ascribes it to his previous birth.

Karma theory tells you that every action has a reaction. It tells you that whatever you experience is not the dispensation of some dark destiny of God. It is of your own making. You lie in the bed which you make. It fills you with confidence. You can have no scapegoat. You are responsible for what you do. Should you not be bound by what you do? The Christian argument against Karma theory is that it restricts God. If I get my own deserts, what room is there for God? Modern Hindu theologians under the influence of Christianity say that God lessens the severity of Karma. The issue is how are we to account for inequality in the world. The communists say it is because of capitalism. Hindus say you cannot blame God so they assert the Karma theory.

The spiritual bank balance is continued through the next life. There is no liquidation of your assets. One life is too short

for spiritual growth especially if a child dies at six months. People may get the strength to change from evil to good through their experience. In Hindu thought the doctrine of Karma enables a man blind from birth to be without bitterness about his blindness. In Christian thought Jesus cured a man blind from birth. A. G. Hogg compares the two in *Karma and Redemption*.⁷ The Hindus say if God just forgives all sins there is no incentive for morality. People will go on sinning. The difference between good and bad will be obliterated. What is the Christian understanding of this? What does repentance mean? Does forgiveness mean that if a man repents of murder, he turns to God, asks him to prevent him from further acts of murder and is saved from the consequences of his murder by not going to jail — or does the man still go to jail and suffer the consequence? If the Christian responds that a person still undergoes temporal punishment (jail) but is saved from eternal punishment, how is this different from Karma theory which says you must face the consequence of your action? Does God rule out the temporal part of the consequences of your action? Does repentance make him free of the consequences of his action? It would seem Christians do admit the temporal consequences of a person's action but deny that redemption takes a number of lives to complete. Does repentance and forgiveness give the power not to commit the sin again by God's power? So the Christian admits that people have to pay for their acts on the temporal level but not in a number of lives. Perhaps shallow Christian preaching of forgiveness has led to such misunderstanding.

The links between the Indian Church and the Western Church

The link which the Indian church has with other churches is a positive one. Of course Hindu people criticize it only because they appreciate it. Because of this link, Christians

7. A. G. Hogg, *Karma and Redemption* (Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1923).

have the financial resources to run the schools and hospitals to which the Hindus like to send their people. Without this link, the Hindus would not be able to receive such benefits. But the link also gives them an excuse for not doing it themselves. They reason that foreign money enables the Christians to provide such schools and hospitals. Since the Hindus themselves do not have such foreign money, they are absolved from providing such institutions themselves.

It would thus be a big mistake to cut away the international moorings of Christianity in India. Indigenous Christianity will never grow without international financial links. Hinduism is languishing today from lack of finance. Their leaders do not provide finance. The effect of Christianity is to awaken the Hindus to practical service. If Christians stop receiving funds, they will not be able to do their service work at all. But do not just do the service work to give people a few benefactions and say this is Christianity. Do not exploit people in such a way. Treat them as equals, as people who are also capable of being awakened to self-sacrifice.

4.

Pattern and Processes in Popular Hinduism

J. C. Gamalief

Introduction

Popular Hinduism is generally understood to mean the religion practised by the masses in the villages of India, where eighty-five per cent of the people of India live. Popular Hinduism is usually spoken of in opposition to philosophic Hinduism as though it was distinct and separate. But there is no such person as a purely philosophic Hindu. Every Hindu, no matter how staunch an advocate or devotee of a philosophy he might be, still may practice some elements of popular Hinduism. Sankaracharya, the greatest philosopher and advaidin of India has written some devotional poems :

Save me from pride, O Vishnu, cure my restless mind.
Still my thirst for the waters of this world's mirage.
Be gracious, Lord, to this Thy humble creature,
And rescue him from the ocean of this world.¹

Even today there is no Hindu, however scholarly and expert in science he may be, who does not in some way believe or practise some aspect of the so-called popular Hinduism. The principal of a college looks up in the sky for an eagle before proceeding to the college at 10 a.m. A doctor tells a patient's relative that the biopsy has come from Vellore and the treatment should begin the next day at 9 a.m. The relative responds that the next day is Thursday. The doctor understands. He calculates and tells the relative that the 'Rahu Kalam' is till 2.30 p.m. on that Thursday. The doctor agrees that the patient be brought after 2.30 p.m. for beginning the treatment of cancer.

1. Quoted by S. Radhakrishnan in foreword to Srinivasachari, *Advaita and Visishtadvaita* (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1961), p. xi.

On the other hand the concept of a simple villager owing allegiance to some village deity alone is a myth. There is no villager, no matter how simple and unsophisticated he might seem, who does not believe in or subscribe to some high philosophy. He may not be able to spell out all the tenets of the philosophy in the form of a syllogism. He may utter some stray concept or tenet. But behind those tenets or concepts lies a whole world of philosophy whether Advaita, Visishtadvaita, Saivasidkanda or the value system of the Thirukaval.

In Bombay while returning from a funeral, a Christian asked an illiterate Nair watchman who also participated and helped in the funeral 'why don't you join us?' He retorted: 'What do you say? You and we. What is meant by you and we.' This illiterate Nair who could not sign his name was giving some basic concepts of the Advaita philosophy. Once an old lady was complaining about the haughty behaviour of a gardener of the seminary campus. Finally she consoled herself, 'Is this not all the leela of Bhagwan. This is all Maya, unreal, an emanation of Brahman.' This again indicates the world of the Advaitin.

A broker walked into our home and to our chagrin and perplexity was bitten by our dog. While we were panicky and apologetic, he calmly replied 'What should be, should be. What should happen should happen.' The great inexorable law of karma was in action. Great philosophies have infiltrated the mind of villagers and permeate their thinking.

In India the state of Kerala has the highest literacy (75%), the largest percentage of Christians (22%) and the largest number of communists. It has three temples at the heart of its state capital, Trivandrum: Padmanabha temple patronised by the Maharaja of Travancore, Abhedananda temple dedicated to Krishna and patronised by the Nair Community and the Ganapathi temple on the roadside. The Ganapathi temple attracts the biggest crowds and gets the largest offering. He

is the Vighneswaran, the God of obstacles. So it is imperative that at the commencement of a journey, the opening of a shop, at the fixing of a betrothal of a marriage, or at the beginning of any endeavour or enterprise Ganesh or Ganapathi has to be appeased. His favourite food is coconut and plantains. The worshipper throws the coconut on the hard rock floor and as it breaks and the water wets the ground, the Vighneswaran is pleased. The devotee could proceed in confidence that no rain would mar the marriage and no puncture of his car tyre would obstruct his journey. A smooth sail over the rough sea of the uncertainties of life is assured. The broken coconuts are sold by auction. Two years ago they were sold for two hundred thousand rupees.

Mayadevi is a living 'goddess' walking on the shores of Cape Comorin. She never speaks. All kinds of legends have grown around and about her. Some say that she is five hundred years old. Nobody knows where she was born, or when and how she came to Cape Comorin. Dressed in rags she spends her time at the shore. Somebody built a hut for her. About twenty dogs surround her. A famous native physician accompanied by his grand-daughter, a college student, visited Mayadevi and offered her plantains. She peeled one and stretched it out to a dog. He took a bite. The rest she offered to the famous physician. He received it in all reverence as a blessing. He in turn gave it to his grand-daughter and said 'Daughter, take it, you will get moksha (salvation)'. She turned away in disgust and replied 'Grand-father, I do not want that moksha'. Unperturbed the physician ate the 'blessed' plantain solemnly.

About five years ago a businessman from Tuticorin built a beautiful temple for Mayiyamman at Cape Comorin opposite the light house. It is situated in a spacious compound with a beautiful garden of flowers, and a guest house for pilgrims is built at the back of the temple. The temple has cost over two hundred thousand rupees. The devotee has employed a cook to cook food and take it to Mayiyamman three times a day.

But she is so detached from the world that she will not stoop to eat with her hands. Some devotee puts balls of rice into her mouth. She is detached and has conquered all desires. Mayiyamman is an avatar of Devi.

At about seven in the evening, as it becomes dusk the scene becomes alive. A Bhakta lights a fire on the shore in front of the hut. Some women start chanting and singing. Finally the Mayiyamman walks leisurely to the fire as though oblivious of the people and the worship around her. Then she squats on the ground. Devotees close upon her—lawyers, doctors, businessmen and a horde of women. Chanting or singing goes on for half an hour. Then she slowly rises. There is anxiety in all faces. There is a mad rush toward her. But she picks a few at random to bless by placing her hand on their heads. What satisfaction and sense of fulfilment they enjoy. She walks briskly to her hut. Those blessed are jubilant. For the others there is always next time.

Popular Hinduism is not an isolated phenomenon, practised only by the illiterate masses in the villages. It is practised by every Hindu in some form or other. Hence the importance of the subject in India today.

Definition of popular Hinduism

Popular Hinduism is a complex phenomenon which results from the interaction of Brahminic, Dravidian, Pre-Dravidian and Tribal religions. Some element from all these will be discernible in popular Hinduism. A good deal of absorption, assimilation and synthesis is discernible in popular Hinduism, the degree of assimilation varying from place to place. Popular Hinduism is a phenomenon and a process. J. H. Hutton, the Census Commissioner of India in 1934, has treated the subject of interaction among factors from the various religions :

‘Though derived no doubt from multiple sources, the Hindu religion may fairly be said to have taken its final form as the result of the impact of the social ascendancy

of the Indo-European invaders of the second millennium B. C. on pre-existing religious institutions. The first occupants of India were probably Negritos, and elements of their belief, perhaps including the reverence for the pipal tree and possibly a primitive phallic fertility cult, both of which are found in the Andaman Islands, may have been perpetuated by the proto-Australioids, who were the next comers and possibly contributed the totemic theory, or at least the basis thereof. Later elements were probably of Mediterranean and Iranian origin, and may have contributed a phallic and a megalithic culture and the life-essence theory, but the relative positions and identities of the Dravidian speaking, Mediterranean, Armenoid, Eurasiatic, proto-Australioid, Kolarian and Mon-Khmer or Austro-Asiatic peoples are difficult to determine and there is little material from which to draw a conclusion; some would identify the proto-Australioid and the Kolarian-speaking racial elements. If the latter elements be distinct from the proto-Australioid, it would be convenient to suppose that the Kolarians came after them with a life-essence theory and the Mediterraneans still later to develop it into one of reincarnation, while bringing in the worship of the Great Mother, but it is conceivable that the Mediterraneans brought both the theory and its development and the Kolarian came later as a barbarian invader, though no doubt already in possession of the soul-matter philosophy. At any rate, the hill tribes of Assam, Burma, and Indo-China appear to contain an element of Caucasian stock which penetrated to the south-east of Asia before the southern migration of Mongolians of the Pareoean branch, and the soul-matter theory must have arisen very early in the history of the human race. Both Kolarian and Mediterranean must have been followed by religious elements from Asia Minor, brought via Mesopotamia by traders and settlers from the west, which no doubt superseded a fertility and soul-matter cult by one of personified deities, sacrificial propitiation and a formalized worship, again with phallic

elements and such institutions as that of the *devadasi*, together with astronomical lore and cults of the heavenly bodies and priestly institutions which formed the basis of modern Hinduism; the final form of which was no doubt determined by the successful conflict of this proto-Hinduism on the religious side with the imported religion of Iranian and 'Aryan' invaders to whom, however, it had to concede much socially, resulting in the socio-religious position of the priestly order so familiar in India.²

Popular Hinduism revolves around a chabutra, shrine or a temple. Worship and rituals result in the creation of many functionaries—priest, diviner, shaman, astrologer, magician, exorcist, and sorcerer. Thus along with temple gods and goddesses, popular Hinduism lives and thrives, feeding and being fed by divination, shamanism, astrology, magic, exorcism, sorcery, vows, sacrifice and weekly, monthly or yearly 'pongal', 'Koda' or festival at home, in the village or in a place of pilgrimage.

Temples

A certain hierarchy may be seen in temples of popular Hinduism. As evolution and synthesis or syncretism take place the complexity of the temple also increases.

Thekkathu (the Southern hall of prayer) : the most primitive place of worship is a room in a house designated for that purpose or, in homes with better financial status, a separate hall in the south of the house called 'Thekkathu' is built. Again in the most primitive form uninfluenced by the higher Hinduism as in Bechantha near Parassala, one can find a hall twelve by four. There are no statues or pictures, just a bare hall. In the next stage a platform is built in the front and a red cloth spread over it. At Malyadi, Janardana Panickar said that his father built a hall of worship (pooja muri) for the ancestors. Later he put the picture of Ayyappa there. He visited Sabrimala for twelve years and in the thirteenth year he died

2. J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India* (Oxford, fifth impression, 1980) p. 223-4.

People who cannot afford a separate hall serve food to the ancestors on leaves in the dark corner of a room ; it has come to be called 'give in the corner' (moolayil kodukkuha). The ancestors come and eat the essence. Food should not be tasted before it is offered to the spirit of the ancestors.

This ritual of 'feeding the ancestors' takes a communal aspect on 'Karkadakavuu' when tens of thousands go to the sea-shore to give sacrifice for the mukti of the ancestors. The shores of the Arabian sea will be packed with people on that day. Those who cannot afford to go to the sea-shore go to the nearest river or pond to offer sacrifice. This is known as 'Vavu bali'.

Pictures of gods and goddesses in the house and their significance

It has become the fashion to have the pictures of many gods and goddesses in homes. Kuttappan Panikkar, the leader of Karichamancode village has about twenty pictures of Siva and the Vaishnava complex. "We need all gods. We should not offend anyone." That is his philosophy. Of course from among the pantheon one—in his case Krishna—will be his Ista-Devata. Not only in houses ; in every shop you find the picture of gods and goddesses. Some have the picture from Guruvayur or Thiruyathi. Chellappan Panickar, a cloth merchant of Cheruvilloor makes his annual pilgrimage to Guruvayur, 50 kilometres away. A statistical officer from the village Kollamamadi makes his annual visit to Thiruchendur.

The Seven Sisters

Today popular Hinduism is greatly influenced by Saivism, Vaishnavism and modern gurus and cults. But unadulterated popular Hinduism, if one may use that expression, the religion of Pre-Dravidianism, seems to centre around the Seven Sisters. They are found all over India. In Bombay they are named as : 1. Sithadevi, 2. Pithaladevi, 3. Harbadevi, 4. Hingladevi 5. Ambabhavari, 6. Kokladevi, 7. Jari Mari.³

3. I have learnt this from informants—it is subject to correction.

In Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu they are called Mutharamman, Esakkaiamman, Mariamman, Kaliamman, Pechiamman, Uchimakali, Chandanamariamman (names vary from place to place).

Temples of Saiva and Vaishnava complex

Through cultural contact and interaction, temples of Saiva and Vaishnava complex have come into the villages, towns and cities of India. The temples of Saiva complex are dedicated to Siva, Parvathi (Devi), Murugan (Subramonian, Pillaiyar), Ganapathi (Ganesh), Ayyappa. The temples of Vaishnava complex have Vishnu, Ram, Ram-Sita, Ram-Sita Laxman, Hanuman or Krishna as the chief deities. The latest temples built in suburban Bombay are all Hanuman temples.

Now we turn to see how popular Hinduism is at work in some specific villages and the processes involved and patterns discernible.⁴

How temples are born

We will take examples of how temples are born and dedicated from Bombay, Karakonam, Malayadi, Kariamaram and Chunkankadi.

Shankarji Temple of Old Malad

Bombay, the gateway to the East has six million people. Highly westernised with glittering five star hotels, skyscrapers, huge factories, and a flourishing film industry, it is a paradise of millionaires. Behind the noise and tumult there flow the deep undercurrents of religious rituals and worship. Temples flourish, gurus are adored and saints are feared and revered.

4. In this section I will be quoting from fieldwork notes. I acknowledge a deep debt of gratitude to Dr. Henry H. Pressler, founder of the School of Research at Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur, for introducing me to social sciences and research methodology.

We shall try to form some inkling of the religious life of Malad, the fastest growing suburb of Bombay. Malad is seventeen miles north of the heart of the city on the Western Railway. While Bombay consisted of seven marshy islands two hundred years ago inhabited by Kolis (fishermen), Bandaries (toddy tappers) and mosquitoes, Malad was an obscure small village inhabited up till 1942 by Kolis (fishermen) and Kumbhan (potmakers). The railway station was started in 1942 and the growth of Malad began.

In Old Malad (West) there stand the Jari-Mari and Sitladevi-Pathladevi temples. Jari-Mari is the oldest village god. The pujari who resigned his job in the police, a Marathi, said that it was rebuilt and trustees consisting of Marathis, Gujarathis and Parsees take care of the temple. 'Wish fulfilment' is the peculiar nature of the temple. In 1961 the daily income of the small temple in front of a pond was Rs. 60 to Rs. 80 per day. Attached to the temple is a hall where teaching and preaching were conducted.

Between the Jari-Mari temple (stones with eyes that watch over the village) and Sitladevi-Pathladevi temples situated near the Koliwada and Kumbarwada is a Shankarji and Ram temples. They must have come later. Regarding the beginning of the Shankarji temple one man said :

Once a Sanyasi came from somewhere and sat on the heap of rubbish near the Sitladevi-Pathladevi temple. People gathered around him. He said that a temple should be built for Shankarji on that spot where the rubbish was heaped. The people asked how a temple could be built on that dirty place. The temple should be on holy ground. A few days later another yogi appeared. He sat on the same spot and made the same suggestion. Then people responded and a Shankarji temple was built.

A new temple at Karakonam

There used to be an old Yakshi-temple at Ponnanikonam near Karakonam, in the south of Kerala. Two brothers were living near that extinct temple. The older has eight children and is poor. The younger is rich. He has one daughter who studied up to S.S.L.C. and got married. The younger brother reported: 'My wife was having some trouble (harassment, Upadravan) the last several years. When we approached an astrologer (prasnakaran) he told me that the temple should be rebuilt. So I rebuilt it.'

The idol cost Rs. 150. Drummen were paid Rs. 30 and the loudspeaker set cost Rs. 50. Altogether it cost Rs. 300 to instal the new idol. The renovation also cost about Rs. 70. The older idol is kept at the back of the temple outside. It looks much cruder.

Thirty feet from the Yakshikoil, offering was made to Malavelan. The devotee said that some forefather of theirs might have stolen a lime or something on a visit to the forest. The Malavelan must have been sent to harass them. That is why his wife was sick. The ghost or Vatha had to be appeased. The sacrifice was done under a murukku tree. Malavelan has no temple. A cock is sacrificed for him under some tree, usually a murukku tree, A sort of platform is made with coconut leaves and an offering is made there. Once the temple is renovated, every year there will be 'koda' or food and sacrifice to the deity.

Malayadi Yakshi Temple

Govinda Panikkar, the Panchayat member and secretary of the temple committee reported :

"A woman of our family had some trouble (Upadravan) from an evil spirit. The astrologer (prasnakaran) told us that building a Yakshi temple would be the remedy. It was built

seven years ago (1961). Now we are celebrating the seventh anniversary. It began on 18th February 1968 Sunday with religious talks and ended on the 20th night with sacrifice of a goat and chickens.

On the final day they had the villuppatu where they sing a song about the demon (Yakshi). The legend and myth are propagated through the villuppatu.

There are sixty families in that 'pidaka' attached to the temple. Each family offers a pongala on the final day. There were four rows of hearths. They were lit at 11.30 p.m. and rice was cooked by 12.30 p.m.

At 12.30 drums were beaten and a 'Shanku' blown. One woman, tall, slender with light complexion stood forty feet from the temple and started slowly moving. The eyes of people were focused on her. She had her eyes closed and her body was slowly swaying. One woman standing behind her let loose her tied hair. After a while she began to jump and dance. Now she stood before the temple, in between the temple and platform. Drum beating became more brisk and loud. She wore a loin cloth, a blouse (light yellow) and a towel thrown over the shoulder.

One husky man took the towel and tried to bind it around her waist. She objected. She took it back and placed it across her bosom tucking one end in front near the waist and under the waist cloth. Then one woman offered her a red cloth. That she took and tried to tie it around her waist over the loin cloth (so that the loin cloth may not slip).

Now she began to dance more briskly. As the man was tying the red cloth around her she caught the neck of another man (for support) and danced.

She belonged to Malayadi and was married off to 'the east'. She came the previous evening. If she did not, she would then dance here in her home.

As she was dancing a girl of about 23 dark and well-built was brought to the arena by some women. A man caught her and brought her forward. She was looking askance and biting her lips.

The older woman danced around her. The younger again bit her lips. Her hands were turned outward as though to dance, and her body swayed slightly.

The older woman poured some water on her head, then pulled her by the hair. Finally she took a burning wick from the flower bed and showed it near her mouth and nose. The younger woman fell on the floor with a cry.

One of the priests asked her 'Will you go away? Will you again come to Malayadi?' He was, of course, asking the evil spirits which had possessed her. After a while she got up and both went to one side of the temple. People surrounded them. The drummers continued to beat the drum standing in front of the temple and then later moved to the side.

Then they had the 'ponkala' feast of food offered to the deity: something of a sacramental meal."

There are three Yakshi temples at Malayadi. One belonged to the Nairs, the second to the Ezhavas and the third to the Nadars. The Nairs' temple is the oldest. It was in ruins until recently when it was rebuilt because of troubles felt by one ancient Nair family. The Nadar temple was built when one Nadar's daughter got a child. So he presented a deity with a child in her hand to the temple.

There are two sisters at Malankaru-Malankevu Yakshi at Mandaikadu. The older is called 'Yena'. The younger is more ferocious. If the younger takes possession of someone, it will not leave easily. The Malayadi-Yakshi temple is dedicated to the older. Madan is Yakshi's brother. An offering is made for him near the temple under a tree (foot of a tree).

The Siva temple of Malayadi is on the top of a tall rock. A priest comes every Wednesday and Saturday. All the Malayadi families give ponkala at least once a month.

Yakshi, Madan and Kali Temples of Karimaram

A Christian convert, Paramu Panickar remembered his old family temple at Karimaram near Parassala. Up till the 1930's blood sacrifices were held there. Forty-two acres of land belonged to their joint family. At the extreme end away from the road there is a pond around which were three deities—Yakshi, Kalee and Madam Kannukalai Madan (protector of cattle). He reported:

I remember having seen two sacrifices. First cocks were killed for the Yakshi, then for Madan and finally for the Kalumadan (Kannukulimadan). There was a mukkumpala tree under which sacrifices were given for Yakshi. Yakshi is more fierce than Madan. For Madan a platform (Thalam) was made near a rock and sacrifices offered. For Kalumadan sacrifices were given under the foot of a palmyra tree. Usually sacrifices are done on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sunday nights. The ceremonies last from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. During the month of Vrichigom (November) there is an annual festival. Mutharammonkoil, the big temple situated about two kilometres from here is connected with this shrine. For the annual festival holy water (Theerthajalam) is taken from this pond. For Yakshi and Madan cocks are offered. For Kalumadan raw rice and a cock are cooked under the palmyra tree (pongal) and it is served on sixteen pieces of plantain

leaves. That is meant for the many spirits. Then the food is partaken by all. A lot of plantains are brought by people as offerings. That is also distributed to people. During the festival at Mutharammankoil the procession starts from this pond from where Theerthajalam is taken to the temple with the accompaniment of drum and nagaswaram.

Even this Mutharammankoil which is the chief temple of the Ezhavaras of the locality (Uchakkada) is undergoing a change. The dynamics of change are notable here.

One informant, Kunku Krishna Panikkar gave the following information :

Q. Do you go to the Roman Catholic Church regularly?

K. Yes, I do.

Q. I heard that you have become the president of the festival committee of the Thazhathuvila Mutharammankoil.

K. Because of some difference of opinion with my brother-in-law regarding a marriage, I stood aloof for some time. But now I am a baptized member. However, I had to become the president of the festival committee to finalise some matters, especially the installation of the new deity at the temple which project was started while I was still a Hindu. This involved about Rs. 400 and I had some responsibility about it. So I act as president and want to finalise the matter.

Q. Who is the new deity?

K. The new deity is Durga Bhagavathi. The former one was Mutharamman. It was made of mud. No abhishekam (bathing) was possible with water, milk or ghee. I ordered the new deity from Myladi. It is of stone. Now abhishekam is possible. Moreover there can be no blood sacrifice for Durga Bhagavathi. Durga puja has to be

more pure (Sudham). Kali and Durga are different. Blood sacrifices are offered to Kali still.

Whether the distinction he makes between Durga and Kali is true is doubtful.

Here Mutharamman gives way to Durga, a god of Saiva complex. Three kilometres from this Mutharamman temple was another Mutharamman temple owned by another group of the same caste. Around 1960 they renovated the temple and the new temple was a Krishna temple, a deity of Vaishnava complex.

This dynamic of sanskritisation is most obvious in the Koli temple of Versava, Bombay. The Kolis or fishermen have four temples. The evolution of these temples is clearly discernible. The first one is a simple stone dedicated to Hingladevi, the sea goddess who is their provider and sustainer. In the second temple the deity looks like a Koli woman. In the third temple Hingladevi like Saraswati stands in the middle of a platform. Lined on the platform on either side are several gods. In 1950 a big new temple was built. That was a Ram Mandir. It has Ram, Sita-Laxman and Hanuman on the side. Attached to Ram Mandir on one side is Sankarji temple. Hingladevi has disappeared. At Kollamamadi is a temple for Usikatan. On the platform below are three deities, including Vishnu. One could predict that the next temple will be a Krishna temple.

At Peruvila near Nagercoil the Nadars had an Amman (Mutharamman) temple. That was renovated by two rich brothers, one of whom is a contractor. The renovated temple is a Murugan temple. They imitate all the rites, rituals and festivals of the Murugan temples of the Vellalas of the same village.

This process of sanskritisation shows how cultural contact, rise in economic conditions, the craving for social status and competition with higher castes all play a part in this dynamics of change.

The Esakkiammankoil of Chunkankadai near Nagercoil

Chunkankadai is five kilometres north of Nagercoil on the road to Trivandrum. About eight hundred families live there. Nairs live on one side of the road. On the other side are some Pandarams. Behind the Pandarams are many houses of Sambavars. Most of them are Christians. Behind the houses of the Nairs on the elevated ground at the foot of a hill are about two hundred huts occupied by potters (Kusavars). They are squatters. One potter woman is the pujari of the Esakkiammankoil.

The story of the shrine is that once some Nairs of Chunkankadai went to Pandi (beyond the Ghats) to buy sheep. They could not buy any. So when they saw two flocks of sheep, they just drove them back to Chunkankadai.

The woman who owned the sheep came searching for them. As she called, all the sheep naturally went near her. But the people beat her and chased her away. So she let out three powerful spirits to Chunkankadai one Esako, one Bhoothathan and Bhootham. One is near the road (a tall rock pillar) in the midst of Nair houses.

The pujari of the temple is a tall, slim, good-looking smart woman of twenty-seven or twenty-eight. She comes from Parassala. She is a Kusava (potter).

As dusk approached three Nair women wearing dhoti, blouse and angavastram came to the shrine. The pujari came, removed the stone slab that covered the main deity (Esakkiamman) lit lamps and the perfumed sticks. By that time a Nair woman of fifty came helped by two boys. She had difficulty in walking. It took about twenty-five minutes for the pujari to light all the lamps. Then she threw flowers at the deity and garlanded her. Then she took her seat before the deity and began to talk to the sick woman in a low voice. About ten women surrounded the sick woman.

The pujari said that the sick person had not given what she had promised to the 'devi'. The sick woman began to weep. "I shall give whatever you ask for. Only do not trouble me. Devi, why should you trouble me like this. I feed the hungry and help others. I do no harm to others. For the last twenty-six days I am suffering. For ten days I was at the Jaysekaran Hospital, spending over Rs. 50 per day. He treated me for pneumonia. Now I have a back pain. During the day time I am alright. But at night I cannot have a wink of sleep. Oh, if only I can sleep peacefully tonight." She wailed and wept.

"Will you give 'pongala' next Sunday if you are well tonight?"

"I will do that. I can afford that. If I spent so much at the hospital, can't I do that?"

"On the 29th of this month will you give a cock and also instal an image?"

With tears the patient said "Surely. I will do that. I shall give a cock and an image of a woman like me. Why should you trouble me like this. If only I can sleep peacefully tonight. Or you take me too as the eighth? You have already taken seven already." (Could they be her children, or members of her family?)

'Idayathi' (shepherdess), the Kolappanda family which owned those extensive lands where the Nairs and the Kusavans lived had deaths each year and believed that men will die before they are 45.

The pujari gave bhasmam to all those present. There were two teenage Nair girls also there. When the crowd dispersed, the sick woman started walking. After getting down to the road she walked back and sat leaning on the pillars of the thatched pandal saying, "I am tired, I cannot walk". When she was helped by her sons, the pujari said "No, she will walk. You need not help her."

The pujari herself was sick sometime ago. She used to dance. One pujari from Parassla cured her. After that she got this 'blessing' (anugrahams) of divination.

Pig sacrifice at Masanam Temple of Peruvila

Peruvila is the largest village at the edge of Nagercoil town. It has twenty-two temples. Krishna temple is owned by a Brahmin on the roadside. One Yakshi temple on the road to Parvathipuram is owned by a Nair family. A small shrine is at the foot of the tree. The demon lives in the tree-trunk. As you enter the village, on the left is the government-owned Siva temple which has almost fallen with disuse. The paid pujari lights the lamps. Worshippers are very few. Is it a dying temple? On the right is a colony of Vellalas who have a beautiful new Murugan temple. On the left is a colony of Muslims with their mosque. As we move from and on the right side is a C.S.I. church with a few families of Nadar Christians. Within fifteen yards of the C.S.I. church are two Narayanaswami temples, one on the right and the other on the left. That is a modern movement. At the front of the church one road turns to the left. At the end of the road about a furlong away is an Amman temple, the oldest temple of the Nadars. Almost facing it is another newer Amman temple owned by Sambavars.

Connected with the Nadar Amman temple about a furlong away across the fields on the side of the canal is the Masanam temple where pigs are sacrificed. Going beyond the Narayanaswami temple, on the right is an Oosikattan temple (which is really a Madan temple, but more powerful). Beyond that is the newest temple of the village, built by the two brothers mentioned already. They renovated an old Amman temple to build a new Murugan temple. The rich contractor acts as pujari. Fasting, religious lectures, feeding the people on Fridays, and the tenth day 'Mahishura Vadha' festival are the new features of the temple.

The pig sacrificing ceremony of the Masanam temple took place in the following way.

On April 2nd 1971 there was a Koda by Shanmugam Nadar. Masanam is a simple platform with two stones with tapering top. A few feet away are two similar stones. They are vatha (spirit of the departed). The Koda took place as follows :

At 7 p.m. three drummers came and started beating the drum on the verandha of the ammankoil. After twenty minutes they got down from the verandah and drummed standing on the yard. The crowd was gathering. After ten minutes they started walking to the house of Shanmuga Nadar. At 8 p.m. they started beating the drum again. People gathered, in all about 150 children, 50 women and 59 men.

It is a big house. In front is a spacious yard. A pig weighing over 200 pounds was lying in the yard tied to a bamboo pole. Near that provisions were kept : flowers and about two dozen pots, half a dozen big new pots and other small pots of different sizes. The owner gave new dhoties to three men. They wore them and gave the old dhoties to a woman. As the drummers beat to a deafening pitch two of those men began to shake and dance. The third was staring and showing signs of shaking, but he did not move as the others. After twenty minutes of dance, some young men took the pig on a bamboo pole. The legs of the pig were tied and it was carried with belly up. Others took the plantains and rice and followed the pig. They went along the by-lanes around the village. Finally they took the pig to the Masanam shrine and placed it on a pile of firewood already arranged. A pit is dug before the big platform (altar) of Masanam—one foot high, eight feet long and six feet wide.

People offered rice and water to the pig as is done to a dying person. Then the pujari danced, stabbed the pig to death and drank its blood. He came running from the graveyard to kill the pig. Then the pig is burnt over the fire. At the same time many hearths are lit and rice is cooked. It is heaped on

two mats spread in a thatched shed, specially prepared for this purpose.

Beating the drum and the dance goes on till early morning. In the early hours of the day food is served for all. Many poor people from the neighbouring slums also come and participate. The total expenses come to Rs. 500.

The next Friday there is a festival at the Murugan temples. Only rice and sweet pudding is served. The next Friday a pig is again offered at the Masanam temple. One of the young men who carried the pig was the brother of the devotee and also a graduate from Scott Christian College.

After experiencing the religious world of the demon worshippers let us see how these gods and goddesses are added to the pantheon.

How gods are made

The old potter was at work at Chunkankadai. He was painting an idol. Altogether there were four idols. One was of Chembakavalli, a ferocious devi. Her teeth were protruding. There was a ferocious look on her face. She was biting one child. She was crushing another under her foot. One she has on her left arm. The idol is to be given to a shrine on the way to Kumarakoil.

A second idol was of a girl. Instead of ferociousness there was a look of serenity. He said that it was going to the Madamkoil near Aramnoly. It had been vowed by a family from Trivandrum for a sixteen year old girl. She was ill and they vowed it to that temple. He got the order to make this idol through his relatives who live in Kottar.

A third idol of a soldier was going to a shrine near Thikkanamode. A young man was trying to join the army. Everywhere he was rejected. Finally he went to his family shrine,

touched the feet of the deity and promised to offer an idol if he was selected. He went for recruiting and was selected. Now he has written to his people to offer the idol of a soldier with a rifle in his hand and to conduct a koda in his name in the family temple on the next day.

We could spend hours watching the worship at the Shankarji temple of Malad, Bombay or the three hour long worship in the Sai Baba temple of Nagercoil on Thursdays and Sundays; the Abhenanda Ashram of Trivandrum where 'Hare Ram Hare Krishna' is chanted day and night (for Namajapa is the pulse beat of the temple and if Namajapa ceases the temple dies); the Ramadevi temple of Trivandrum where trance is the climax of worship or to the Sidha Veda Ashram of Karakada, Trivandrum where men and women live together, wearing only a loin cloth and spend at least six hours in yoga meditation and six hours in the field working and earning a livelihood. Religious life is so complex, intricate, interesting and challenging.

Besides his ista devata and the village temple, the villager has allegiance to some distant temple whether Sabarimala, Thiruchandur, Guruvayavappan or Kumarakoil. People visit the healing cults of Rajavur, Vettyked, Sahagamata, Edathur, Velanjanur which are run by Roman Catholics; Bhemapallu, Chenappalli, Thakkalai run by Muslims; Attukal, Mandakkadu, run by Hindus. Here caste and religion are transcended. Modern personality cults, whether Narayanaswamy of Swamithappu, Nagercoil, Naragana Guru of Vaikale, Abbedananda of Trivandrum, Sai Baba or Midyananda of Ganeshpur, Bombay also come under popular Hinduism. They also have a place in the religious horizon of the Hindu worshipper whether he is a simple villager or a sophisticated city dweller.

The world of the gurus

The world of the gurus opens up another dimension of popular Hinduism. While each guru teaches a philosophy based on the Vedas and Upanishads and a few intellectuals read and study

that philosophy, the common mass looks up to the guru as a man who embodies 'mana', some supernatural power which would heal, bless, remove obstacles and fulfil the wishes of the devotee.

The magazine *India Today* of October 31, 1982 carried an article about the death of Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpur of Bombay. When the 73 year old guru died, a continuous 16 day chant in his honour was started in the globe-girdling thirty seven ashrams and 300 meditation centres.

Muktananda had for fifteen years groomed two young children, Matti and Subhash Shetty, a sister-brother team. The actual installation of the stripling gurus—Malti is 24 and Subhash turned 20—can only take place after a team of Shaivite priests from the Shankaracharya lineage proclaim them 'Sidhas', or self-realized beings. On October 17, at the end of a massive 'mahayagna' ritual, the pair will formally inherit Muktananda's vast spiritual following world-wide and, in terms of cash, a transcontinental empire worth over Rs. 100 crore. Included in their flock of disciples will be over two and a half million foreigners and more than half a million Indians.

One of the distinguished disciples of Muktananda is Dr. Eugene Calender. In addition to being a leading light in the American Civil Rights movement and professor at the Columbia Business School, he is a Presbyterian minister who runs the largest church in New York's Harlem ghetto.

The theological interpretation of Popular Hinduism

Man is a worshipping animal. He is frantically seeking to know his creator. As Augustine said :

God, thou hast made us for Thyself
And our hearts are restless
Until they rest in Thee.

The Hindu seeks to appease spiritual forces. Fear and uncertainty surround him everywhere. Evil spirits are real to him. The law of karma is a bondage. Astrology makes man a mere victim of celestial forces. Philosophers try to wean man from worship and sacrifice. Though abstract speculation may give some intellectual satisfaction, it does not answer the quests of his heart and soul. He moves from one deity to another, and from one guru to another. In pilgrimage and meditation he seeks fulfilment.

Demonology cannot be ignored. Demons and demonic forces are at work. Spirit possession is real. In spite of demonic forces and the perverted guidance of ego-centred gurus and philosophers, God's law is at work. People are still dimly conscious of the decalogue because of their conscience. That still gives a code of ethics in the dark world of demons and demonic forces.

Might Paul's words in Galatians 3:23-24 be applied here? Paul speaks of the bondage and curse of the law, principalities and powers and justification by faith. Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. In spite of Satan and demonic forces God has not abandoned people to their free will. Otherwise mankind would have become extinct. God holds these forces in check and the law operating in the hearts and minds of men still provides the point of contact for communicating the gospel of the cross where he has won a decisive victory over Satan and all powers and principalities. In his explanation of the second article of the creed, Luther says that we have been redeemed from the power of sin, Satan and death not by silver and gold but by the holy and precious blood of Christ and his innocent suffering and death. People are in bondage, darkness, fear, uncertainty and death. It is to such people that the joyous message of peace, liberation, certainty, assurance and life has to be proclaimed.

The missiological implications of popular Hinduism

Popular Hinduism, with all its complexity and intricacies provides stepping-stones to the gospel. However dim and vague may be the ideas, they are still stepping-stones. There are some concepts of sin and guilt, the need for sacrifice and atonement and the search for communion with the deity through meditation or a sacramental meal. Of course the conviction of sin becomes real only before a holy and righteous God, which popular Hinduism and high Hinduism lack. But God has not left any without a witness. That witness is not sufficient for salvation. Some knowledge of God and the saving knowledge of God in Christ through God's word and the Holy Spirit are entirely different matters. Still, we have a point of contact and stepping-stones to the gospel.

Objective scientific and sympathetic study on the one hand and evaluation by good theological tools on the other are needed.⁵ Holy agnosticism and irresponsible generalisations about God's love and grace that lead to universalism are most dangerous. Sympathetic and objective understanding on the one hand and deep spiritual convictions about the Word Incarnate and the vicarious death and resurrection of Christ are absolutely necessary for ministers of the gospel. Training in missiology and research should help each minister to form his own theology and philosophy of mission and say with Paul who was steeped in God's word and was also aware of the religions and philosophies of the day, 'Woe unto me, if I preach not the gospel'. May God grant that the church in India will take up the challenge of popular Hinduism with faith, vision, conviction, knowledge and discernment.

5. It will be helpful for Evangelical churches and institutions to have centres of study and research where they employ the methodology developed in social sciences for the study of religious phenomena first hand with objectivity and openness. They will harness various intellectual disciplines for scientific study for the cause of the gospel.

5.

Folk Religion in Andhra Pradesh and Some Missiological Implications

Paul G. Hiebert

Introduction

Much has been written on religions in India¹ and on the Christian response to them.² However, with few exceptions, these have dealt with the great universal religions of Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. Implicit in these writings is the assumption that folk religions, where they are to be found, are confined largely to tribals and Harijans on the margins of society, and that Indian villagers have a basic knowledge of and commitment to the orthodox beliefs of India's high religions.

The basis for this assumption is the nineteenth century theory of unilineal religious evolution advanced by Sir James Frazer, Lewis H. Morgan and E. B. Tyler. Like the medieval Christian theologians, they sought to explain life in terms of a universal history, but following the lead of Comte, they did so in naturalistic terms. They argued that religious beliefs and practices, like other parts of culture, evolved from simpler

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1. G.A. Oddie ed *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times* (New Delhi, Manohar Book Service, 1977); Kenneth W. Morgan ed. *The Religion of the Hindus, interpreted by Hindus* (New York, The Ronald Press, 1953) Louis Renou, *Religions of Ancient India* (London, Athlone Press, 1953); Max Weber, *The Religion of India the Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, trans. H.H. Gerth and D. Martindale (New York, The Free Press, 1967). H. Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*. (London, James Clarke and Co., 1938).
 2. Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carmen eds., *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World* (New York, Orbis, 1978)

folk religions to high or universalistic religions. Tyler traced the origins of religion to an earlier belief in spirit beings that arose when primitive humans, reflecting on the nature of dreams and death, came to the conclusion that they had invisible souls which could leave the body and wander to distant places. This belief, he argued, was later extended to include the concepts of life after death, to independent spirits, to gods, and finally to one high god. Frazer, on the other hand, traced the origin of religions to magic and postulated the mental progress of humans from magic based on pre-logical thinking, to religion, and finally to science.

Unfortunately, this theory of religious evolution has deeply influenced missionary thinking since the 19th century. Nor are we rid of it today, despite its rejection by anthropologists and the growing body of research that has shown its detrimental effects on mission strategy.³

Not much has been written about folk religions in village India. There are numerous studies of tribal religions but little on folk religious beliefs and rituals in Hindu and Muslim communities. There are some references to the latter in the many volumes on tribes and castes of India.⁴ Occasional comments appear in travel accounts and polemical mission literature, but these, for the most part, were chosen to titillate or to shock. There are notable exceptions. The most penetrating studies of folk religion in villages come from missionaries such as Elmore, Whitehead, and Abbe Dubois⁵ who

3. cf. J. Wiebe, *Spiritism in Brazil* (Doctor of Missiology Dissertation, School of World Mission, Pasadena, California 1980).

4. e. g. E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, *The Tribes and Castes of South India* (Madras, Govt. Press, 1909, seven volumes); Russell and Hiralal, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* (London, Macmillan, 1916); L. A. Krishna Iyer, *The Travancore Tribes and Castes* (Trivandrum, Govt. Press, 1937-41); Hassan, *Tribes and Castes of H.E.H., the Nizam's Dominions* (Hyderabad, Govt. Press, 1936).

5. W. T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism* (Madras, C. L. S., 1925); H. Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India* (Calcutta, Association Press, 1921); Abbe J. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947).

combined a desire to understand the people they served with many years of first-hand experience of village life.

Recent studies have come from the pens of anthropologists. Often, however, these have reflected a functionalist approach that reduces religious beliefs and practices to epiphenomena that serve to integrate society. They are not taken seriously in their own right as systems of explanation dealing with various areas of life. According to functionalists, religion draws people together into a community of shared beliefs and practices, and reinforces the community's authority over them by declaring these beliefs and activities to be sacred.

It is only in the past fifteen years that the social sciences have taken seriously religious beliefs as systems of ultimate explanation. The data, however, has come largely from Africa and Southeast Asia. Apart from some missionary writings,⁶ little has been written of folk religion in India as a way of dealing with the problems of human existence. What has been written shows that folk religion plays a more widespread and profound role in village life than commonly has been thought. Moreover, it provides a system of explanation that coexists with and is complementary to the explanation systems of Hinduism and Islam. Most villagers draw upon both folk and high religious beliefs. Their choice of which to use depends upon the questions being asked or the problems being faced, the circumstances surrounding the situation, and the personal inclinations of the individuals involved. However, despite the efforts of religious leaders in Hinduism and Islam, in addition to those of Christians, folk religions do not die easily. To understand the confrontations between high religions and folk religions, we need to analyse the roles each plays in the lives of the villagers.

6. Henry H. Pressler, *Primitive Religion in India* (Madras, C.L.S., 1971)

Folk religion in Konduru

Folk religion in Andhra Pradesh includes a wide range of inter-related beliefs and rituals. Konduru is a village of some three thousand people from thirty-two castes located one hundred twenty miles south of Hyderabad. Two years of resident field work there revealed an astonishing array of religious practices. The most obvious religious activities centre around Hinduism and Islam. There is a large Rama temple with daily puja and regular annual festivals, a Siva temple that is now largely abandoned, a shrine to Hanuman that attracts an occasional worshipper and hosts an extended festival for one month a year, and a Narasimha temple on a nearby hill that ministers to the Harijans. The Brahmin purohit presides at high caste marriages and at special devotional services (bhajans) held in the homes. Many homes have household shrines to one or more family gods linked to the Hindu great tradition. The Muslims have a mosque, a mulla, daily prayers and a series of annual ceremonies and life cycle rites.

People turn to Hindu and Muslim beliefs to order their lives and to deal with ultimate questions. Births, marriages and funerals—the rites that mark the states of life—are religious affairs as are also the annual festivals associated with the life cycles of the gods, with the cycle of the year, and with cosmic events.

Normal activities in the village are handled by “folk sciences”. The people know how to raise crops, build houses, fish in tanks, cleanse cuts and set broken bones. They have numerous theories drawn from rational reflections on human experience and based on naturalistic notions of cause and effect. Similarly, they have theories that can be labeled folk social science. These include theories on how to raise children, relate to a mother-in-law and deal with crime in the village.

It is in the gaps where sciences provide no explanations, or when they fail that the villagers turn to folk religious beliefs for answers. These most commonly are the crises of life such

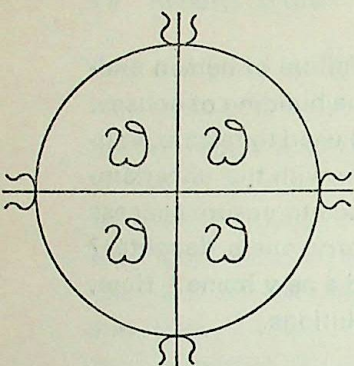
as illness, drought, barrenness, and the failure of human endeavours such as the raising of crops and the building of houses. At such times, folk religious practices are used to restore well-being. Another set of problems has to do with the uncertainties of the future and the need for guidance to ensure success in a venture. To whom should one marry one's daughter? Should one enter a new business or build a new home? Here, too, villagers turn to folk religion for solutions.

Explanations in folk religions are given in terms of local female goddesses, ghosts (bhootums) spirits of various types (dayams, rakshasas, ghoshums, yavanas, apsaras, etc.) magic, planetary influences, evil eyes, sorcery and witchcraft associated with evil powers (shakti), and loss of village strength.

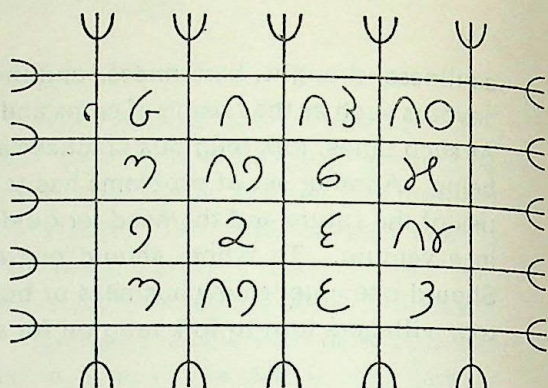
For solutions to these problems of everyday life, the villagers often turn to a diviner to diagnose the situation and to recommend a course of action. If the case is serious, the villagers may turn to several remedies simultaneously in hopes of saving the situation. Thus it is not uncommon for them to seek treatment for an illness from a modern allopathic doctor, a local ayurvedic doctor and the local village magician or astrologer at the same time and also to stop at the local temple to offer a prayer and make a vow.

One common system of explanation and remedy in Konduru folk religion is that of magic. This consists of mantras or powerful chants, ventras or magical written symbols, and mandus or magical medicines (see figure 1). For the most part, the magicians or mantrakars use their powers for the benefit of individuals or the village as a whole. They heal certain illness, protect people from danger, assure that new buildings will be auspicious, help barren women to have children and guarantee success in new ventures. Mantrakars, however, particularly the more powerful ones, are open to charges of black magic and of secretly misusing their powers for a fee.

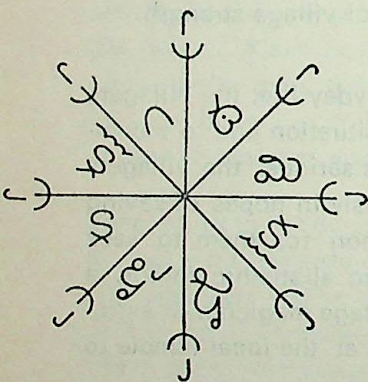
FIGURE 1
MAGICAL CHARMS IN AN INDIAN VILLAGE



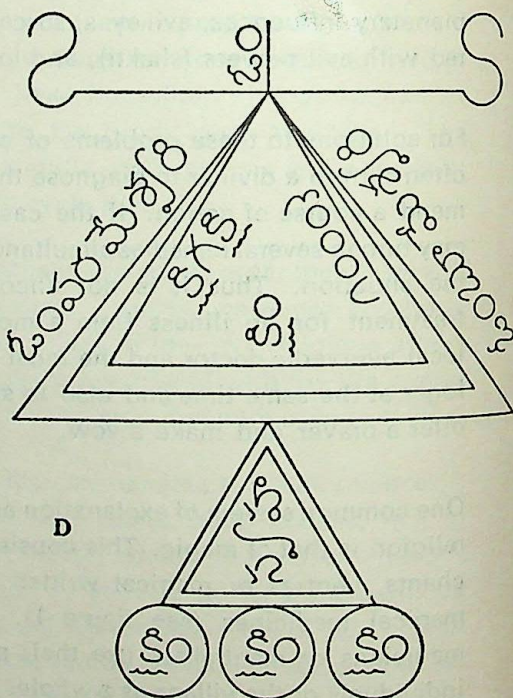
A



B



C



D

Magical charms, when properly used in a South Indian village, will automatically bring about the desired results. These charms combine powerful figures, sounds, and words. A: Yantra for a headache, including writing it on a brass plate, lighting a candle before it after it is wrapped in string, covering it with red and yellow powders, and tying it to the head. B: Yantra for assuring conception, involving inscribing it on a piece of paper or copper sheeting and tying it to the arm of the barren woman. C: Used for malaria. D: To the god Narasimha, for power and general protection.

There are a number of mantrakars, in Konduru. Many use a few simple home remedies. A few have studied extensively under gurus, and have been initiated into more powerful forms of magic by long stays at remote graveyards or by immersion in a well during the eclipse of the moon. The latter must observe a great many restrictions lest they lose their power. They must stop eating their evening meal if they hear a jackal howl, if they see a widow, or if they smell the smoke of a funeral pyre. They must avoid performing their magic on a pregnant woman lest the foetus draw away all their strength.

A second system of explanation is that of the evil eye. Some are born with it. A few consciously seek it as a malevolent power that they can use against enemies. Its effects are felt particularly by those in liminal states such as birth, marriage, and other times of ritual transition.

There are a number of common preventives to the evil eye. Children are given names of gods to solicit their protection or undesirable names to draw attention away from them. Baby boys are disguised and raised as girls who are considered less likely targets for the evil eye. Dark spots are drawn on children's faces to distract from their beauty. Pots with white spots on them are placed on poles in the fields to attract the first gaze of those passing who have an evil eye and broken pots are indicative of their success in protecting the crops. Elaborate tinsel headdresses (basingas) are tied to the foreheads of brides and grooms to ward off the powers of the evil eye.

A third system of explanation is that of astrology which explains events on the basis of planetary forces. These forces, like mana, influence a person's life depending on such factors as the date and moment of a person's birth, the location of the planets, and the astrological charts of the individuals concerned. Villagers turn to the local Brahmin astrologer or to

other self-styled specialists who use the panchangam to discern suitable times for important occasions in life.

A fourth system of explanation in Konduru's folk religion is that of the local goddesses. There is a sharp distinction between these and the high gods and goddesses of Hinduism and the Allah of Islam. The latter are cosmic in character. Their activities are recorded in the Puranas and other scriptures of the Hindu and Muslim great traditions. They reside in temples and mosques, are served by Brahmin priests and orthodox mullas, and are venerated in regular cyclical rituals of daily worship and annual festivals. In both Hinduism and Islam, male deities are dominant, although in Hinduism there are a great many female deities married to the gods. Furthermore, in Hinduism, heterosexual relationships are common themes in mythology. Hindu deities are vegetarians and sacrifice brought to them include foods, flowers, clothes and adornments.

Village goddesses, on the other hand, are local beings who reside not in some other world but in wells, trees, fields and houses around the village. According to a village proverb, their dzupu or range of travel and power is ten miles. To be sure, the next village is likely to have many of the same goddesses resident in it, but unlike the Hindu and Muslim high gods, these are thought to have separate personalities of their own. In a sense, they are similar but autonomous manifestations of the goddesses.

Village deities are basically asexual in character. Female spirits are dominant, but a number of male ones are found, often as brothers, guardians, or aids to the goddesses. None are married. Unlike the gods of Hinduism and Islam who are righteous and stand in opposition to rakshasas, saitans, and other evil beings, the goddesses are capricious—almost amoral. They reward those who care for them, but can be malicious in their actions. They are jealous beings and must constantly be

placated with offerings of cloth, food, and blood sacrifices brought by a washerman, shepherd, or untouchable priests.

Knowledge of the goddesses is stored in oral traditions: in dramas, stories, proverbs, songs and rituals. The rituals, for the most part, are crisis rites for many of the local deities who are associated with diseases, drought, and disasters or with protection and prosperity. Common throughout the area are the seven sisters associated with small-pox, cholera, plague and other major scourges that used to stalk the countryside decimating the population. When disasters strike, family or community rituals are organized. All homes in the village are expected to contribute to the purchase of a waterbuffalo or goat to be sacrificed to the angry goddess.

One major community ritual associated with the goddess has to do with her journeys through the land. Periodically, a goddess is reported to be passing through the villages and coming from the west. Each village, in turn, must escort her with proper ceremonies to the village to the east. Processions and feasts are held in her honour at the ritual boundary of the village on three evenings a week apart. On the last night, the goddess is feasted and escorted to the territory of the neighbouring village. There lights are extinguished and the villagers steal home by different paths so as not to attract her back.

A second major community ritual associated with Konduru folk religion is the village strength rite. This has to do not with the local goddesses nor with Hindu gods, but with the supernatural strength (*mana*) of the village as a corporate body. At the founding of a village, a navel stone (*bord rayi*) is established at its centre, a symbol of its members. When a village is plagued by continued misfortune, village strength ceremonies may be organized. Each family, whether Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, is expected to contribute to the purchase of a waterbuffalo that is sacrificed at night by a leatherworker.

The head of the buffalo, topped by a lamp, is taken around the ritual boundaries of the village. Periodically, limes are cut and balls of rice mixed with blood are buried along the boundary. No outsiders are allowed lest they steal some of the rice and with it the strength generated by the ritual. If crises such as drought persist, the village may organize a vigil at the bord rayi in an effort to renew the life of the village.

Jatras and Durgas of Andhra Pradesh

Two types of rituals not referred to so far are jatras (melas) and durgas. Jatras are religious fairs. Some are held at Hindu temples to re-enact the marriage of the resident deities or to honour the birth of a god. Others are held at the site of a local goddess or saint. Durgas are Muslim fairs held at the tomb, real or replica, of a male saint. Both jatras and durgas attract vendors, entertainers, and, more recently, political representatives who set up temporary stalls to cater to the gathered crowds.

The 1961 *Census of Andhra Pradesh* lists a total of 6,707 jatras and durgas held in Andhra Pradesh outside of Hyderabad City each year.⁷ These range in size from gatherings of one or two hundred worshippers to half a million or more gathered for a week of festivities. Most have less than ten thousand participants.

The distribution of deities and saints venerated at jatras and durgas gives us some idea of the relationship between high

7. The 1961 *Census of Andhra Pradesh* Volume 7 : A.P. Fairs and Festivals (18 Volumes). The Number of Jatras and Durgas in Andhra Pradesh according to size of attendance :

| <i>Number in Attendance</i> | <i>Number of Jatras</i> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| less than 500 | 4,432 |
| 501 - 1,000 | 1,087 |
| 1,001 - 2,500 | 380 |
| 2,501 - 5,000 | 422 |
| 5,001 - 10,000 | 221 |
| 10,001 - 50,000 | 134 |
| 50,001 and above | 31 |
| Total Number of Jatras in AP* | 6,707 |

* Excluding those in Hyderabad City

and folk religions in the villages of Andhra Pradesh. A total of 1,239 beings are worshipped.⁸ Of these one hundred ninety-five are Muslim saints. Most of these were Muslim missionaries to India, many to parts of Andhra Pradesh. Many of them settled near some village and ministered to the people: preaching, healing and counselling. Upon their deaths, their tombs became the centres of annual rites. Processions of disciples, often from neighbouring villages, bring silks to cover the tomb and flowers and incense to offer at the shrine. After prayers, the disciples retire to a pandal to retell the story of the saint in song and *guzul*. Meanwhile, Hindu devotees come to offer coconuts incense and prayers, and to make vows to the spirit of the saint. The following day, goats are slaughtered and food prepared which is offered first to the saint and then eaten as a family communion meal.

Siva, Vishnu, their consorts and associates are the dominant figures in Hindu jatras. Siva, in particular, is worshipped by many different names. In Andhra Pradesh jatras, 161 names are clearly those of Siva and 5 are probably so. Most names

8. Deities and Saints in Andhra Pradesh Jatras and Durgas

| <i>Deities</i> | | <i>Saints</i> | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|------------------------|-----|
| Hindu Male Deities | | Hindu Male Saints | 152 |
| Forms of Siva | 161 | Hindu Female Saints | 81 |
| Possible forms of Siva | 5 | Muslim Male Saints | 195 |
| Associates of Siva | 22 | Jain Male Saint | 1 |
| Forms of Vishnu | 49 | Christian Male Saint | 1 |
| Possibly forms of Vishnu | 9 | Christian Female Saint | 1 |
| Associates of Vishnu | 15 | Parsi Male Saint | 1 |
| Other Male Deities | 82 | | |
| Hindu Consorts | 27 | | |
| Folk Male Deities of this Earth | 18 | | |
| Folk Female Deities of this Earth | 361 | | |
| Caste & Tribal Deities (all male) | 27 | | |
| Nature and Village Name | | | |
| Deities (mostly female) | 31 | | |

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Total number of Deities worshipped | Total number of saints vene- |
| in Jatras 807 | rated in Jatras and Durgas 432 |
| Total number of Deities and Saints worshipped in Jatras and Durgas... 1239 | |

are associated with only one or two jatras. 22 Associates of Siva, such as Nandi, Virabhadra and Kumara, are objects of worship at jatras. Although Vishnu is venerated in fewer forms (49 names plus possibly 9 more), the number of jatras in his honour, particularly as Rama and Krishna, is great so that the worship of Vishnu equals or exceeds that of Siva. 15 Associates of Vishnu and 82 other Hindu deities are venerated in their own rights at jatras. Finally, 27 female consorts of the high Hindu gods are the central figures in jatras.

A majority of the jatras, particularly the smaller local ones, centre around village goddesses, nature deities, tribal gods and male and female saints. A total of 361 local goddesses are venerated in the Andhra Pradesh jatras. Those associated with diseases, such as the seven sisters (Maicamma, Muthalamma, etc), with the death of children (Balamma), with fertility and with success are the big majority. In addition, there are 31 deities named after villages and other objects of nature such as hills, animals and rivers. Most of these, too, are female. The 27 deities associated with specific castes and tribes are all male. In addition, there are 18 other local male gods such as Pothuraju, brother of the seven sisters.

Many jatras venerate Hindu saints: 152 are male saints such as the Alwars, Chaitanya, Basaveswara and Sai Baba, 81 are female saints. A large number of the latter are wives who committed sati upon the deaths of their husbands one or two centuries back.

In addition to these, religious fairs are held in honour of two Christian saints: Fatima and Joseph; one in honour of a Jain saint, and one in honour of a Parsi saint.

Low Sudra (washermen, shepherds, etc.) and Harijan (leather-worker) priests generally officiate at the folk religious jatras. Blood sacrifices are common and high caste people generally

stay away, although in times of dire crisis, they often send sacrificial animals to the deity by the hand of a servant.

An analysis of Hindu and folk religious jatras

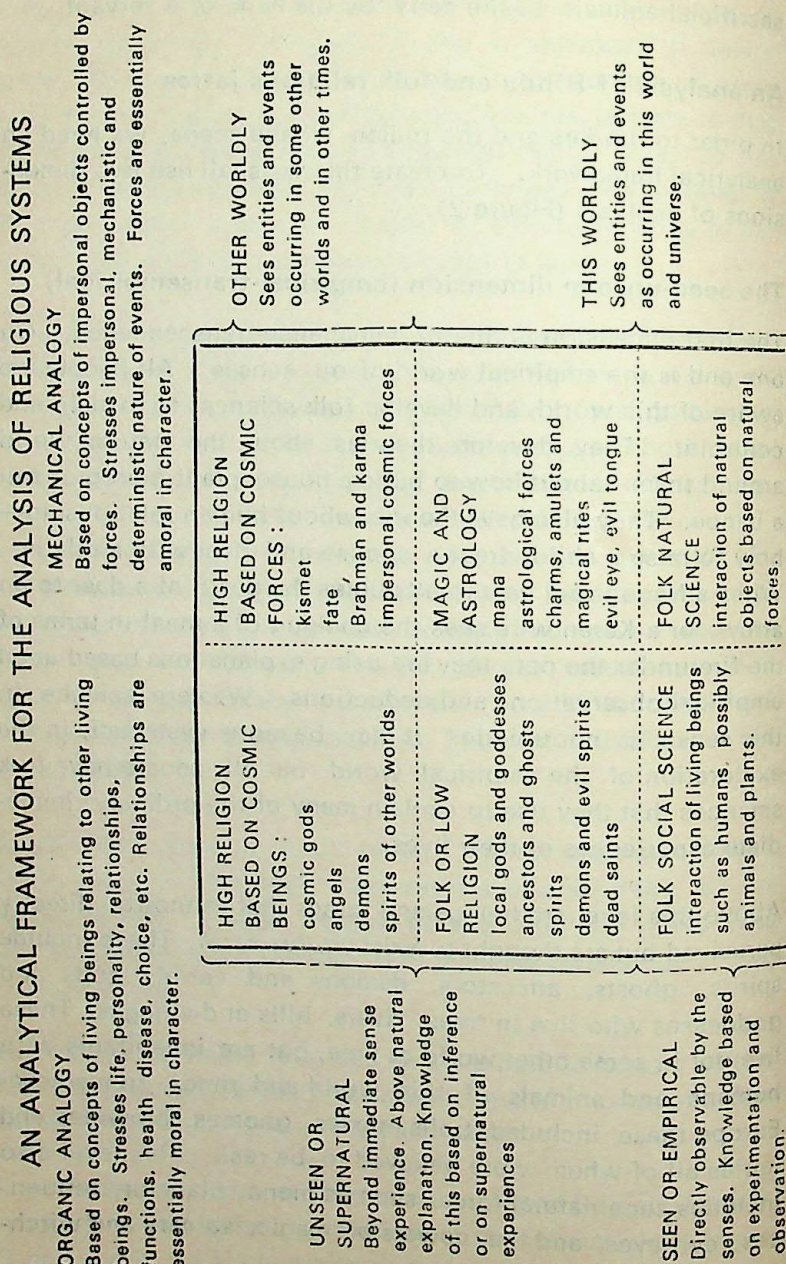
In order to understand the Indian village scene, we need an analytical framework. To create this we shall use two dimensions of analysis (Figure 2).

The seen-unseen dimension (empirical-transempirical)

The first dimension is that of immanence-transcendence. On one end is the empirical world of our senses. All people are aware of this world, and develop folk sciences to explain and control it. They develop theories about the natural world around them—about how to build a house, plant a crop or sail a canoe. They also have theories about human relationships—how to raise a child, treat a spouse and deal with a relative. When a Naga tribal person attributes the death of a deer to an arrow, or a Karen wife sees the cooking of a meal in terms of the fire under the pot, they are using explanations based upon empirical observations and deductions. Western science, in this sense, is not unique. It may be more systematic in the exploration of the empirical world, but all people have folk sciences that they use to explain many of the ordinary, immediate experiences of their lives.

Above this level are beings and forces that cannot be directly perceived but are thought to exist *on this earth*. These include spirits, ghosts, ancestors, demons and earthly gods and goddesses who live in trees, rivers, hills and villages. These live not in some other world or time, but are inhabitants with humans and animals of this world and time. In medieval Europe these included trolls, pixies, gnomes, brownies and fairies all of whom were believed to be real. This level also includes supernatural forces such as mana, planetary influences, evil eyes, and the powers of magic, sorcery and witchcraft.

FIGURE 2



Furthest from the immediate world of human experience are transcendent worlds—hells and heavens—and other times such as eternity. Here are African concepts of a high god, and Hindu ideas of Vishnu and Siva. Here is located the Jewish concept of Jehovah who stands in stark contrast to the Baals and Ashtaroth of the Canaanites who were deities of this world of the middle zone. To be sure Jehovah entered into affairs of this earth, but his abode was above it. On this level, too, are the transcendent cosmic forces such as karma and kismet.

The organic-mechanical continuum

Scholars have widely noted that humans use analogies from everyday experiences to provide them with pictures of the nature and operations of the larger world. Two basic analogies are particularly widespread: (1) to see things as living beings in relationship to each other, and (2) to see things as inanimate objects that act upon one another by means of force, like parts in a machine.

In the first or "organic" analogy, the elements being examined are thought to be alive in some sense of the term, to undergo processes similar to human life, and to relate to each other in ways that are analogous to interpersonal relationships. For example, in seeking to describe human civilizations, Spengler and Toynbee speak of them as living things. Civilizations are born, they mature and they die. Similarly, traditional religionists in India see many diseases as caused by goddesses that are alive, that may be angered, and that can be placated through supplication or the offering of a sacrifice. Christians see their relationship to God in organic terms. God is a person and humans relate to him in ways analogous to human relationships.

Organic explanations see the world in terms of living beings in relationship to one another. Like humans and animals, they may initiate actions and respond to the actions of others. They may be thought to have feelings, thoughts and wills of their

own. Often they are seen as social beings who love, marry, beget offspring, quarrel, war, sleep, eat, persuade and coerce one another.

In the second or "mechanical" analogy, things are thought to be inanimate parts of greater mechanical systems. They are controlled by impersonal forces or by impersonal laws of nature. For example, western sciences see the world as made up of lifeless matter that interacts on the basis of forces. Gravity pulls a rock down to the earth not because the earth and rock wish to meet—neither earth or rock have any thought in the matter. In western science even living beings are often seen as being caught up in a world ultimately made up of impersonal forces. Just as we have no choice about what happens to us when we fall out of a tree, so it is often thought we have no control over the forces in early childhood that are believed to make us what we are today.

Mechanical analogies are basically amoral in character. Forces are intrinsically neither good nor evil. They can be used for both. Organic analogies, on the other hand, are characterized by ethical considerations. One being's actions always affect other beings.

Many of the similarities between modern science, magic and astrology which have been pointed out by anthropologists are due to the fact that both use mechanistic analogies. Just as scientists know how to control empirical forces to achieve their goals, the magician and astrologer control supernatural forces of this world by means of chants, charms, and rituals to carry out their purposes.

One of the greatest cultural gaps between western people and many traditional religionists is found along this dimension. The former have bought deeply into a mechanical view of this

world and of the social order.⁹ To them the basis of the world is lifeless matter controlled by impersonal forces. Many tribal religionists see the world as alive. Not only humans, but also animals, plants and even rocks, sand and water are thought to have personalities, wills and life forces. Theirs is a relational, not a deterministic world.

The excluded middle

An examination of this analytical grid shows immediately that the western world views tend to exclude the middle zone. Many western Christians have a two-tiered view of reality: a religious level based on faith and manifest in miracles that is concerned with other-worldly problems, and a scientific level based on experience and manifest in the natural order dealing with problems of this world (see figure 3). Beings and forces of the middle level, such as ancestors, spirits, magic and the evil eye are treated as "fairy stories". It is hard to realize that scarcely three centuries ago, fairies, gnomes, trolls and other spirits, and magic were taken seriously in the West.

Because folk religions deal primarily with middle level beings and forces, it is easy to understand why missionaries did not treat them with the seriousness they treated the high religions. When people spoke of fear of evil spirits, missionaries denied the existence of the spirits rather than claim the power of Christ over them. The result, as Newbiggin has pointed out¹⁰ is that western Christian missions have been one of the greatest secularizing forces in history. It is also easy to see why in early evolutionary theories of religion, folk religions were considered "prelogical" and as more primitive than the high religions.

9. Cf. Peter Berger et al., *The Homeless Mind* (New York, Vintage Books, 1974).

10. Lesslie Newbiggin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1966).

FIGURE 3

A WESTERN TWO-TIERED VIEW OF REALITY

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| RELIGION | faith, miracles, other worldly problems, sacred. |
| (EXCLUDED MIDDLE) | |
| SCIENCE | sight and experience, natural order, this worldly problems, secular. |

How did this two-tier world view emerge in the West? Belief in the middle level began to die in the 17th and 18th centuries with the growing acceptance of a Platonic dualism,¹¹ and with it, of a science based on materialistic naturalism. The result was the secularization of science and the mystification of religion. Science dealt with the empirical world using mechanistic analogies, and left religion to handle other-worldly matters, often in terms of organic analogies. Science was based on the certitudes of sense experience, experimentation and proof. Religion was left with faith in visions, dreams and inner feelings. Science sought order in natural laws. Religion was brought in to deal with miracles and exceptions to the natural order, but these decreased as scientific knowledge expanded.

What, then, are the questions asked at the middle level? Here one finds the questions of the uncertainty of the future, the crises of present life and the unknowns of the past. Despite knowledge that seeds once planted will grow and bear fruit, that travel down this river on a boat will bring one to the neighbouring village, the future is not totally predictable. Accidents, misfortunes, the intervention of other persons and other unknown events can frustrate human planning.

11. Roger K. Bufford. *The Human Reflex* (San Francisco, Harper and Row 1981), p. 30.

How can one prevent accidents or guarantee success in the future? How can one make sure that a marriage will be fruitful and happy, and endure? How can one avoid getting on a plane that will crash? In the West these questions are left unanswered. They are "accidents", "luck" or "unforeseeable events", and therefore unexplainable. But many people are not content to leave so important a set of questions unanswered, and the answers they give are often in terms of ancestors, demons, witches and local gods, or in terms of magic and astrology.

Similarly, the crises and misfortunes of present life must be handled: sudden disease and plagues, extended droughts, earthquakes, failures in business, or the inexplicable loss of health. What does one do when the doctors have done all they can and a child grows sicker, or when one is gambling and the stakes are high? Again, many seek answers in the middle level.

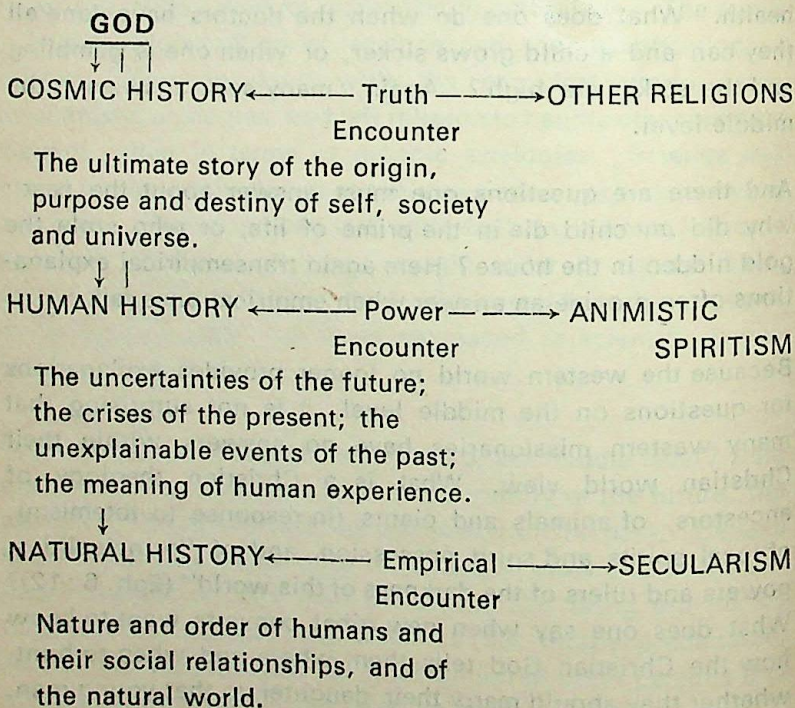
And there are questions one must answer about the past: why did *my* child die in the prime of life, or who stole the gold hidden in the house? Here again transempirical explanations often provide an answer when empirical ones fail.

Because the western world no longer provides explanations for questions on the middle level, it is not surprising that many western missionaries have no answers within their Christian world view. What is a Christian theology of ancestors, of animals and plants (in response to totemism), of local spirits and spirit possession, and of "principalities, powers and rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph. 6:12)? What does one say when new tribal converts want to know how the Christian God tells them where and when to hunt, whether they should marry their daughter to that young man, or where they can find the lost money? Given no answer, they return to the diviner who gave them definite answers, for these are the problems that loom large in their everyday lives.

Implications for missions

What are the implications of our study of folk religions in India for the church? First, it points out the need for missionaries to develop wholistic theologies that deal with all areas of life (see figure 4), that avoid the Platonic dualism of the West, and that take seriously body and soul. On the highest level this includes a theology of God in cosmic history: in the creation, redemption, purpose and destiny of all things. Only as human history is placed within a cosmic framework does it take on meaning, and only when history has meaning does human biography become meaningful.

FIGURE 4
A WHOLISTIC THEOLOGY



On the middle level, a wholistic theology includes a theology of God in human history: in the affairs of nations, of peoples

and of individuals. This must include a theology of divine guidance, provision and healing; of ancestors, spirits and invisible powers of this world; and of suffering, misfortune and death.

On this level, some sections of the church have turned to doctrines of saints as intermediaries between God and humans. Others have turned to doctrines of the Holy Spirit to show God's active involvement in the events of human history. It is no coincidence that many of the most successful missions have provided some form of Christian answer to middle level questions.

On the bottom level, a wholistic theology includes an awareness of God in natural history — in sustaining the natural order of things. So long as the missionary comes with a two-tier world view with God confined to the supernatural, and the natural world operating for all practical purposes according to autonomous scientific laws, Christianity will continue to be a secularizing force in the world. Only as God is brought back into the middle of our scientific understanding of nature will we stem the tide of western secularism.

A second implication is that the church and mission must guard against Christianity itself becoming a new form of magic. Magic is based on a mechanistic view — a formula approach to reality that allows humans to control their own destiny. Worship, on the other hand, is rooted in a relational view of life. Worshippers place themselves in the power and mercy of God.

The difference is not one of form, but of attitude. What begins as a prayer of request may turn into a formula or chant to force God to do one's will by saying or doing the right thing. In religion, we want the will of God for we trust in his omniscience. In magic we seek our own wills, confident that we

know what is best for ourselves. The line between them is a subtle one, but the implications are profound.

A final implication is that we need to train leaders capable of dealing with the questions of folk religion. Most villagers are concerned more with the immediate problems of their lives than with ultimate matters. The pastor trained to deal with the latter but unable to handle the former often appears to them to be answering questions that are irrelevant to daily life.

However, a word of caution is needed here. It is true that the church needs a theology of the Holy Spirit that brings the power of God into everyday life. It is also true that when we deal with matters of the spirit, there are many false spirits. There are false prophets, possessions by evil spirits, and spiritual ecstasies due to demonic influences. Shamen, Hindu gurus, Muslim fakirs and others speak in tongues, heal and prophesy. Consequently, when we deal with the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, we do need the gift of discernment as much as any of the other gifts.

Among the tests of the Spirit of God given to us in scripture are:

- (1) Does the person glorify Christ or does he/she seek attention for himself/herself?
- (2) Does the person manifest the fruits of the spirit (Eph. 4 : 17-32, Gal. 5 : 22) or does he/she have a spirit of pride and envy?
- (3) Does the person seek the fellowship and unity of God's people (1 John) or is he/she divisive?
- (4) Does the person maintain the right priorities of seeking salvation and holiness more than provision, healing and guidance?

The church in India must deal with village folk religions. More than Hinduism and Islam, they present the church with the central challenge for witness.

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6.

Hinduism and the Common Man

P. Nagaraja Rao

People in general today, and the Hindu community is no exception, are allergic to religion and are preoccupied with securing the necessary goods for keeping themselves alive and protecting their families. The Hindu religion establishes its chief categories on the authority of the Vedas, not through the deliverances of reasoning or disclosure of sense perception. The educated Hindu is preoccupied with his new knowledge of science and technology and he declares that religious categories like God, soul, salvation, and principles of morality are unverifiable by sense perception or by the process of reasoning. He discards tradition and regards faith in God as taking away the edge of his initiative from life.

The common Hindu blindly subscribes to the existence of religious categories. He visits temples, offers prayers on occasions and fences off religion for a few minutes in a day and for festive occasions. He is religious peripherally and not centrally. He is religious spasmodically and emotionally. He looks upon the Lord as the bestower of goods to him whenever he asks for them in prayer. A large number of Hindus today have become the victims of miracle-making religious leaders. They go to them in large numbers and seek power, pelf and health. As accident would have it, a few such leaders in India are enjoying immense vogue and popularity.

Hinduism is a religion which aims at transforming man from his animal existence into human excellence. Religion is a force, not a form. Religion is not mere belief but behaviour. It is not an exclusive activity set apart from life for a few hours or a few days. It manifests itself in every phase of life. Religious

consciousness does not grow like grass. We have to apply our minds and swelter long on the eternal truths till they burn into convictions in our hearts. There is no point in learning the lessons of religion, nor lecturing on them, if we forget to live by them. The lessons are born of faith. We must fight temptation. Temptation is not a problem to be solved. It has to be met and overcome. There is no bypassing morality in religious life. You cannot be godly without being good. Hindu ethics do not admit the possibility of attaining the feet of the Lord without treading the hard path of morality. The Katha Upaniṣhad reads :

Not he who has not desisted from evil ways, not he who is not tranquil, not he who has not a concentrated mind, not even he whose mind is not composed can reach this self through right knowledge.¹

The central doctrine of the Hindus is faith in the love of God. The trouble is that they have faith only in the benefactions of God. The poor man prays to God for benefactions, gets satisfied with the money he receives, and comes away. We should have faith not in the things he gives but faith in his power to transform us. Mental perspicacity, intellectual alertness, extreme resourcefulness, prodigious scholarship, immense wealth are of no avail when not backed by moral life, human service and faith in God, as Arnold Toynbee wrote.

A crowd does not gather at the gates of heaven. One has to be alert and it is as difficult as walking on a razor's edge. "Thousands gather at my gates," Kṛiṣṇa says, "Out of them only one is chosen." The Upaniṣad cries aloud :

Arise, awake, having attained the boons, understand them. Sharp is the edge of a razor and hard to cross, difficult to tread is that path so sages declare.²

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1. Katha Upaniṣhad 1-2-24 in *The Principal Upaniṣhads* edited by S. Radhakrishnan (London, Allen and Unwin, 1953), P. 620.
 2. Katha Upaniṣhad 1-3-14, Radhakrishnan *op. cit.*, P. 628.

Jesus declares straight is the gate and narrow is the path. Many are called, but few are chosen. The Gita affirms the truth that men attain the Lord after striving in a number of lives. If this is so for the contemplative saints, what of ordinary people like us?

At the end of many a birth, the man of wisdom gives himself up to me. [Knowing that Krishna] was Vasudeva's son is All : so great a self is exceeding hard to find.³

Among thousands of men but one, may be, will strive for perfection, and even among athletes who have won perfection's crown, but one, may be, will come to know me as I really am.⁴

The spiritual path is hard and its principal prerequisite is unflinching, steady faith in the Lord and the moral law. The faithful alone are saved. The non-faithful perish and are not happy even in the present life. William James writes, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* :

Faith is what man lives by and, when an occasion demands, lives for. Man needs a working faith in the means he adopts and the goal he seeks. No meaningful existence and purposive life is possible without faith. Faith in the scriptures and the scripture-disclosed truths is the cornerstone that gives the endurance and the means for living an enduring, humanitarian moral life, eschewing gross selfishness.⁵

In *The Modern Predicament* H. J. Paton writes :

A religion which does not flower into moral goodness is a form of emotional indulgence. A man may assent to all the articles of a creed, he may enjoy the most edifying of

3. Bhagavadgita 7. 19 in R. C. Zaehner *The Bhagavad Gita* (Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1969), P. 251.

4. Bhagavadgita 7.3, Zaehner *op. cit.* P. 244,

5. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

emotions, he may be scrupulous in the performance of ritual action, but if he is deliberately cruel, consistently treacherous, completely selfish and entirely unrepentant, his religion is a sham.⁶

The Gita summarises the purport in a line :

A man of faith, intent on wisdom, his senses all restrained, wins wisdom : and, wisdom won, he will come right soon to perfect peace.⁷

The man, unwise, devoid of faith, of doubting self, must perish : this world is not for the man of doubting self, nor the next [world] nor yet happiness.⁸

Hinduism has plenty to satisfy people's varying temperaments. The contemplative type of Hindu can read the philosophical texts like the Brahma Sūtras and their commentaries and realise the Lord through the method of Jñāna. The emotional Hindu has the devotional method of Bhakti. The yogic type of Hindu can attain the Lord through the eightfold path, the psychosomatic training outlined by Patañjali in his Yoga Sūtras. The activist type who is prone to be busy and an extrovert also has his need satisfied in Hinduism's elaborate scheme of rituals, colourful temple worship and its scheme of pilgrimage to different religious centres.

Hinduism is a many-levelled religion and satisfies different tempers according to their eligibility and proclivities. The literature and sacred writings in Hinduism are also suited to different types. The contemplatives have the Upaniṣads and the Brahma Sūtras. The activists have the Bhagavadgītā. The common folk, who need codes of conduct to live by and illustrative lives, exemplifying the different virtues such as Truth, Dharma, Morality, Charity, Chastity and Sacrifice in

6. H. J. Paton *The Modern Predicament*.

7. Bhagavadgita 4.39, Zaehner *op. cit.*, P. 197.

8. Bhagavadgita 4.40, Zaehner *op. cit.*, P. 198.

the lives of great men have the immortal epics — the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Bhāgavata and the other purāṇas. The ritualists have the Āgama Śāstras of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and the Śakta types, prescribing the codes of temple worship and the observance of Hindu festivals.

The principle of toleration in Hinduism has led sometimes to the relaxation of strict standards. The Bhagavadgītā, the sermon on the battlefield, presents Hinduism at its best. It steers clear of the lazy doctrine of do-nothing-ism on the one hand and immense selfish indulgence and enormous acquisition of the earthly goods on the other. It highlights the doctrine of Karma yoga and Svadharma.

Karma yoga is devotion dedicated to the Lord. It is practising the presence of God every moment. It is not doing anything which will lead to God-eclipsing activity. Karma yoga in the Gītā stresses that you should not surrender to God without doing your duty. Duties which you can do you should do. God will not do it for you. Modern religious leaders call on their followers to let go their intellect and loosen the strings of their purse. But we cannot have religion by proxy. We cannot have religion without going to the feet of the Lord and undertaking the normal life.

Going to God for secular benefactions is not wrong. But we should not ask God for benefits limited to money. Ask him to be your saviour and everything else will be added. If you ask him for a limited benefit, the answer will be limited. The trouble is the average Hindu uses God rather than worships God. That is why there is no morality or fellow-feeling. The individual wants individual benefactions and solutions to his problems. He wants the benefactions not the benefactor. Karma yoga in the Gītā says do not do that. Karma yoga affirms that activity is part of human life. There is no freedom from activity; there is only freedom in activity in the words of Tagore. Activity coexists with human life.

The superficially philosophical Hindu regards activity as binding men to the cycle of births and deaths; Śaṅkara advocated the cessation of all activities. The *Gītā* wrought a revolution in the spiritual world by spotlighting that life is impossible without activity either overt or covert. Activity as such does not bind man. But it is the selfish desire and greed (*Kāmā*) that binds. Do your duty in the name of God. Worship God by your activity. The ninth chapter of the *Gītā* stresses that we should surrender ourselves unconditionally to God and he will look after our welfare. If our activities are God-dedicated, and discharged as his work, they do not bind us; but on the other hand actions performed as a sacrifice act as levers to attain *mokṣa*. That is why modern Hindus follow the path of practical ethics in the same way as Christians.

Karma yoga is the central philosophy of the Hindu today. One is to act according to one's training and temperament (*svadharma*) and not strike attitudes and pose to be other than what he is. Each must follow his own style of life. The concept of *svadharma* comes very near Bradley's doctrine of "My station and my duty". This doctrine of *svadharma* has clinched the moral duty for man. The moral duties enjoined on individuals may be relative to their station and temperament. But what is his *svadharma* is absolute for him. So my duty may not be your duty. But the duty enjoined on me by my station and temperament is absolute for me.

The strange phenomenon in Hinduism today is that the devotees want the gifts from the Lord such as wealth, progeny, power and office but not the grace of the Lord. They do not seek God's grace but the secular offshoots from it. In the language of the Bible they seek all other things except the Kingdom of God, reversing the teaching of Jesus, "Seek ye the Kingdom of God and all other things are added unto you". People seek all other things and forget God.

Such an attitude on the path of the devotee makes him forget the Benefactor in the benefactions he receives. If the Lord they worship does not confer the gifts on them such people change their attitude and turn away from God. Worship of the Lord has degenerated into a sort of commercial transaction which is against the spirit of true religion.

Conversion to Islam and Christianity

A few educated Hindus and absolutely illiterate folk who have not enough wherewithal to live their lives and are neglected by Hindu society, seek to get converted into Islam or Christianity. A few months ago we had large-scale conversions to Islam. Such conversions are not born out of conviction but for securing conveniences and creature-comforts. The clever Hindu takes advantage of the efficiently run Christian educational institutions, and well-equipped hospitals, but he is least interested in the teachings of Jesus. If you just offer people benefactions, they will take the benefactions and go away. Christian missionaries should see that the genuine teaching of Jesus, the revolutionary morality he taught and the self-sacrificing love he had for down-trodden humanity are brought home to the Hindu mind. The missionary should highlight that Jesus taught for the incredible period of two and a half years the message of love and did not travel even one hundred miles from his home. Every Christian missionary must communicate how the religion of this great Galilean, with fishermen as his companions, was able to establish Christianity as a world religion with the message of love and sacrifice.

Vivify faith

Talking in the language of statistics, half the world's population is communist, hence atheistic and materialistic. Among the other half, one in three is a Christian. The rest are divided among several religions — polytheistic, monistic, theistic. It is in such an India the evangelist has to work. The

evangelist must do something by the Hindu and not *for* him. He should not give him merely benefits but understanding. This understanding should vivify and strengthen him in his own faith and not persuade him to seek salvation in other faiths.

Faith is belief in the existence of a supreme power who is the bestower of knowledge, power and glory. We must be grateful to him and dedicate ourselves to him in absolute commitment. This power is disclosed by scripture. He controls our destinies. The purpose of life is to realize his grace. Faith cannot be taught like mathematics or geometry. If a person has it, it can be awakened by reading the scriptures and can be cultivated. Faith is different from belief. Belief is taking ideas from others secondhand. Faith is a total commitment without any reserves. Faith gives you the purpose for life and if you know why you live, you have strength to live.

The average Hindu like all others lacks faith and his faith does not take deep roots. Our minds and hearts are like gardens and we grow several seeds in them. We plant the seed of riches, comforts, pleasure, power, health and such other things. These are like thorns and weeds. They grow rapidly, eat up all the nourishment from the soil, drink all the water and crowd out divine feelings in us. Stanley Jones used to say we should be good gardeners, making sure the weeds do not grow. Life's anxieties, fears, eager wishes and small desires are there in us, because we have no faith in the Lord's compassion and sovereignty. We fill our hearts with all sorts of trivia, trinkets and useless goods, with the result that there is no room for faith in God. These feelings strengthen our wills and conflict with God's will and his will does not function. Two wills cannot be in the same place. For thy will to function, my will should go.

Genuine faith is possible when there is no rock behind the sapling which you grow. Many a man's faith grows up like a sprightly sapling promising great growth and splendid results.

But when the blazing sun rises, the plant is scorched to death and withers away. The rock behind it signifies the shallowness of our faith, which for a while in fine weather thrives, and laughs at other plants which are struggling to grow slowly taking deep roots. The laughter is born of shallowness. The fierce sunshine is the testing turmoils, troubles, temptations and struggles in life. Those who have no strong roots cannot stand it.

Where the soil is thin, character, personality and faith do not grow. Some receive religious truths in an excited manner with effusive emotions entertaining earthly values, but these do not stand the test of temptations and the lure of passions. They are there just for a week or month. Their worthy intentions do not grow into fixed purposes. "Impulses do not become principles, good feelings just by themselves do not ripen into fruits of noble character. Heavenly visions are not wrought into holy deeds." We need to apply our mind and swelter all along our life with firm conviction to fence away the non-godly desires and lay strong foundation for our faith.

Lord Kṛṣṇa counsels Arjuna, his beloved companion, chosen instrument and representative man admitting his plea that the mind of man is awfully fickle and wavering. Constant practice and wise renunciation is necessary.

For fickle is the mind, impetuous, exceeding strong : how difficult to curb it. As difficult as to curb the wind, I would say.⁹

Kṛṣṇa answers with loving understanding, admitting the difficulty of the task :

The Blessed Lord said : herein there is no doubt, hard is the mind to curb and fickle, but by untiring effort and by transcending passion it can be held in check.¹⁰

9. Bhagavadgita 6.34, Zaehner *op. cit.*, P. 238.

10. Bhagavadgita 6.35, Zaehner *op. cit.*, P. 238.

The average Hindu lacks deep faith. This shallowness in faith has strange results. The initial enthusiasm wanes. The first glow of faith and slush of emotions of men in churches, mosques and temples do not last long. This is true in every walk of life, where there is no commitment, preparation or faith. Men seek to achieve sudden greatness in life, business, friendship and education. They want to hit the headlines of newspapers and figure as great men. They are like the saplings grown on a rock scorched by the sun. These men who adopt short cuts, laugh at the toiling brood and rationalise their acts with the argument that life is short for such toiling process and trouble.

The malady of the age is shallowness of faith. Men of faith use picks and bars to break the rock, deepen the soil and lay firm foundations. We need to root ourselves in deep convictions. It is depth in faith and conviction and not mere logical consistency that enables us to grow through life without cynicism, frustration and boredom. I find that a person with no faith comes to the end of his life in an agnostic mood. He does not know why he should live, or leave his money to his wife. He does not find an answer to life's questions. He ends on a note of agnosticism. Schopenhauer was a tramp. One night in Berlin he wandered into a park and slumped down. The watchman asked him: "Who are you? What are you doing here?" Schopenhauer replied, "I wish I knew the answer to these questions." Men of irresolute faith who have spasmodic religious feelings, on occasion brandish before us the multiple goods of life in bright colours and like powerful sirens, draw away our tiny boats. Negatively these men of little faith paint virtues like patience, prayer and charity in gloomy colours and describe them as kill-joys and wet blankets in life. They quote Freud in their support, "What the world calls its codes of morals, demands more sacrifices than it is worth; and its behaviour is neither dictated by honesty nor instituted with wisdom". They forget the injunction that suppression leads to suprising outlets.

Men without deep faith are like a toy machine in an exhibition. It catches the attention of everyone with a heavy weight on its head. Put it any way, it flips back to topsy turvy position. We have too much weight on our head, and not enough ballast in our hearts. So the machine flips upside down when left alone. Faith alone can redress the imbalance between the heart and head and make us stand aright on our legs.

Faith can enable us to restore order into our lives. The answer to H. G. Wells question, "What shall we do with our lives?" is to put our minds in order. Things happen first in the mind before they happen in body. Faith alone can put things right. We need not be afraid of dissent, doubt, difference of opinion and error, as long, as Mill put it, "we should allow truth to be free to combat it".

Perseverance is possible only for men of faith. They alone have patience and fortitude. Patience is the finest and worthiest part of fortitude and it is very rare in our age of haste and meaningless speed. There may be perseverance in twenty men and women but it is the twenty-first who is patient, can do his work, and enjoy it. Patience lies at the root of all pleasures as well as all powers. Henry Longfellow wrote, "Sunday is like a stile between the fields of toil, where we can kneel and pray or sit and meditate".

It is faith that makes life purposive and enables us to live not like an animal. Man is born as the beasts are born. He has a greedy egoism, a clutching desire, a thing of lusts and fears. He can regard nothing except in relation to himself; even his love is a bargain and his utmost effort is vanity, because he is mortal. It is faith that can lift him above his selfish nature and transient preoccupations. It is faith that can release him from the prison of the present and makes him see ideals, transcending his meagre personal ends. Faith opens his eyes to the future.

It is faith that can give an answer to the three fundamental questions of Kant — "What can we know, what may we hope, what ought we to do?" It is not that men have no faith at all. Radhakrishnan observes, "The age of faith is always with us; only the objects of our faith change, we depart from one creed only to embrace another". The nature of man according to the Gītā is in essence his faith.

Faith is connatural to the soul of every man: man is instinct with faith: as is his faith, so too must he be.¹¹

Pascal observes, "The human heart naturally loves and the human mind naturally believes". Everyone is moving all the time away from or towards some faith. Faith is the antidote for our infirm will and weak resolutions. Faith is total, integral and organic to man. It is an absolute commitment to the Lord without any reservations, mental or otherwise. It is not a mere theoretic consent to a doctrine or a scriptural statement, nor a passive emotional appreciation. Faith is the result of earnest quest born out of the complete realisation arising out of the insecurities of worldly goods. None can do the quest for faith for us. Others can show the way. We have to tread it. Each must bear the cross and each must crucify his ego, for the light in him to shine. Faith cannot arise from thinking by proxy and repeating its lessons by rote. The religious quest is a struggle and it is existential. It is an ultimate concern of man. It is not one of the many concerns. It must transcend doubt, disbelief and dissent and the lure of popularity. The Danish theologian Kierkegaard observes, "Faith is not a form of rational knowledge, but is an existential leap urged upwards by the full passion of the soul for its salvation, a salvation that comes not from culture, nature or reason, but as a gift from the transcendent God above". The Kathopaniṣad envisages that the Lord has to choose us for liberation out of his abundant grace, which is unconditional

11. Bhagavadgita 17.3, Zaehner *op. cit.*, p. 378.

and non-negotiable either by profound knowledge or stupendous study of scriptures or austere probity of conduct.

This self cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing. He is to be attained only by the one whom the (self) chooses. To such a one the self reveals his own nature.¹²

The masses believe in the Hindu rituals, festivals and superstitions, but do not make the necessary effort to reach the Lord, which alone can give them the transformed life. But there is no gainsaying the fact that Hinduism in one form or other characterises the average unregenerate Hindu. Mrs. Annie Besant, after over a quarter century's active ministry to the Hindu masses affirms, "Make no mistake, without Hinduism India has no future. Hinduism is the soil into which India's roots are struck, and torn out of that, she will inevitably wither, as a tree out of its place."

The role of evangelicals today should be to awaken and vivify such faith. The masses are religious peripherally and not centrally. They seek God only as a transaction. They want to bypass morality. This is the context of your work. It is not wrong to turn to God for material benefits. But a person should not forget God after that. So do not offer people just the benefactions of schools and hospitals. They will take the benefactions and forget the benefactor. Do not tell them first they are all sinners. People understand their problems as sinners. They want to know what you are going to do about it. Describe their problems not as due to them being sinners but as due to their ignorance. Do not emphasize the love of God for sinners in a wrong way. The doctrine of forgiveness must be taught in a way that does not belittle human responsibility and does not encourage people to be more irreligious. The role of the religious man today is to awaken in the average

12. Katha Upanishad 1-2-23, Radhakrishnan *op. cit.*, P. 619.

man the sense of the supreme and of the supernatural. Do not worry about their conversion. Enable them to see what Christianity is. Show them the beautiful life of Jesus. The average educated Hindu has lost faith in himself and his creed. Faith has gone out of his life.

Convert people first from materialism and atheism to faith. Then present Christ. People identify their own bodies with their souls and seek pleasure in all sorts of things. They think that the sense world is all that exists. First clear away this rubbish. Unless you prepare the ground you will make no impact. Enable them to see that there are other things than merely what his senses tell him. Make him admit the existence of God and of morality. The educated Hindu does not have this conviction. So do not criticize their Hinduism like the early missionaries did. Criticize their atheism. The Hindu today is hungry for this sort of thing. So first make him religious and then tell him the religion of love. Awaken the religious and moral sense in them. What is the use of telling people who have no moral sense the superiority of the Christian religion? If a horse is not thirsty, what is the use of leading him to water? So first make the Hindu thirsty then present the living water.

7.

How India's Untouchables view Hinduism

V. T. Rajshekar

Introduction

The Untouchables of India form over 20% of India's 800 million people. Christians have rendered such a signal service to the liberation of Untouchables as can be written only in letters of gold when we rewrite Indian history. Once kept out of the Hindu religion as outcastes, the Untouchables of India today suffer from Apartheid. Before it South African racial segregation and other Black problems of the USA and the UK pale into insignificance. But alas, the Indian Apartheid has received hardly any world attention. It is kept a closely guarded secret.

The Untouchables are what they are today because of Hindu religion, which is followed by about 80% of the Indian population. The correct scientific name of Hinduism is Brahminism which was imported into India by the Aryan invaders. Hinduism, considered the world's most ancient religion, has no parallel in the world. It is a bundle of contradictions. Words such as Hinduism, Hindus or Hindustan do not figure at all in the Sanskrit "sacred scriptures" of Hindus. Hinduism has no founder. It has neither a church nor one single text like the Bible or the Koran. The question "Who is a Hindu?" can be answered only in the negative: one who is not a Muslim, Christian or a Parsee is a Hindu. Its priests are unique in the world. They not only belong to one caste (Brahmins), they are hereditary. At least 95% of the Hindus do not know their "holy books". A majority of them do not even regularly visit temples. At least 30% of the Hindus are not admitted into

Hindu temples. So Hinduism cannot be defined. We can only identify a Hindu by birth. If you are born a Hindu, you are a Hindu.

The caste system, of which untouchability is a part, is the foundation on which Hinduism is built. Remove caste and the Hindu edifice falls like a house of cards. Every Hindu must have a caste. Without a caste there can be no Hindu. The caste system is the other name for Hinduism. Caste and untouchability have divine sanction. Even the Hindu gods belong to different castes. One god fights with another god because of caste rivalry.

Because of this India has become a sick country. Its sickness is affecting the health of other nations, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, UK and Canada.

True Hinduism is actually practised only by Brahmins who form the apex of the caste pyramid. They form not even 5% of the Hindu population and yet they control all the property and privileges. They constitute India's "ruling class". They have supplied every Prime Minister (barring two for very brief period) since "Independence". No one can rule India except a Brahmin. This is the power that Hinduism has conferred on Brahmins.

Hinduism is so powerful that though a foreign religion, it devoured every protest movement including the liberating movement of Buddhism, which was destroyed and driven out of India over 2000 years ago. Brahmins led by Shankaracharya, Madhu Acharya and Nagaraja literally slaughtered Buddhists in thousands. Buddhism today reigns in other parts of the world but is not to be found inside India — except for a feeble attempt made by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The saviour of the Untouchables and the new rising star of India at the end of his life himself embraced Buddhism along with several millions of Untouchables.

Untouchables and tribes, original inhabitants of India

Untouchables and tribes who together comprise a third of India's population are the original inhabitants of this ancient country. But the invading Aryans drove them out. Those who fled to hills and forests became tribes and those driven out of village limits became Untouchables. The stigma of untouchability is not confined to Untouchables alone. In fact one caste is untouchable to other Hindu castes. There is an ascending order of reverence and a descending degree of contempt. But those called "Harijans", meaning "children of god" in the words of Gandhi, suffer not merely from untouchability but unapproachability, unseeability and unspeakability. Dogs and cats are let inside the house but not an Untouchable.

Therefore, every village in India has a ghetto, which is the worst part reserved for these born-bonded slaves who are expected to render free service without expecting anything in return. They do all the menial jobs: cleaning, sweeping, scavenging, agricultural operations, carrying dead cattle and eating the carcasses, building construction and every dirty job. While the men are untouchable, the women can be enjoyed by the high caste men. The country's constitution has introduced some socialist reforms. But we live under a perpetual clash between the ideology of Hinduism and a socialist constitution.

Untouchability among Hindus is thus a unique phenomenon unknown to humanity in any other part of the world. Nothing like it is to be found in any other society, primitive, ancient or modern. The sociologists and historians of India are not interested in the problem of Untouchables because they all belong to the high caste.

Why did beef-eating Brahmins become vegetarians?

The first organised protest movement against Brahminism was launched by the Buddha. The Untouchables joined it en masse. Dr. Ambedkar has discovered that before the Aryans invaded

India, the language of India was Tamil. He said that the war between Buddhism and Brahminism and the defeat of the former resulted in its followers being driven outside village limits. Brahmins undermined Buddhism by infiltrating it. They conducted a war against Buddhism both from without and within. And after vanquishing Buddhism, they inflicted untouchability upon the defeated. The Brahmins, to destroy Buddhism also gave up beef-eating and became strict vegetarians. The Brahmins used to be beef-eaters. The Vedic texts have references to them eating cows. The Brahmins also drank liquor. When Brahmins gave up eating beef other Hindus also followed them. If the non-Brahmins underwent one revolution by giving up beef-eating, Brahmins underwent a double revolution. They gave up meat-eating for the first time and became vegetarians. "To my mind, it was the strategy which made the Brahmins give up beef-eating and start worshipping the cow. The clue to the worship of cow is to be found in the struggle between Buddhism and Brahminism and the means adopted by Brahminism to establish its supremacy over Buddhism."¹ Why did Brahmins resort to the supreme sacrifice of giving up their greatest pleasure in life? Ambedkar says: "Without becoming vegetarians, the Brahmins could not have recovered the ground they had lost in its revival, namely Buddhism".²

The only way for the Brahmins to beat Buddhism was to go one step further and become vegetarians. Today Brahmins (barring those in Kashmir and Bengal) are pure vegetarians and non-drinkers. Non-violence was absorbed into Brahminism. From the day Buddhism was defeated, non-violence came to save Brahmins and destroy the revolutionary philosophy of Buddhism. That is how India turned to cow-worship as a result of the triumph of Brahminism over Buddhism. It was a means adopted by Brahmins to regain their lost glory.

1. Dr. Ambedkar, *Untouchables*, p. 151.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

India is not a nation

Are Indians a nation? Each religion, Muslim, Christian and Hindu, constitutes a different but perpetually warring nation. Muslims (15 %) and Christians (3 %) are being persecuted by the majority. Untouchables (20 %) and tribes (10 %) each constitute a separate nation. Sikhs are now demanding a separate nation—Khalistan. Besides, each caste is a separate nation within Hinduism.

Nationality is a social feeling. It is a longing not to belong to any other group. This is the essence of what is called a nationality and national feeling. But in India, race, language and country do not suffice to create a nation. A nation is a living soul, a spiritual principle. "Suffering in common is a greater bond of union than joy. As regards national memories, mournings are worth more than triumphs, for they impose duties, they demand common effort."³

As consciousness increases along with literacy and other factors, Muslims, Christians and each caste within Hinduism will clamour for separateness. Some people expect India to be torn to pieces in course of time. The Hindu ethos stands for division and disintegration and not for unity. The seeds of destruction are within Hinduism itself.

Apartheid in India—a world problem

The Untouchables of India suffer from the worst form of Apartheid. Negroes are employed as household servants in white houses and, therefore, are not untouchables. But India's Untouchables are kept outside, segregated in all areas. Their very touch, look and even thought leads to pollution. A Black man can be made out from the colour of the skin but not so the Untouchable. He may be fairer than the Brahmin. Nobody

3. Renan quoted by Dr. Ambedkar in *Thoughts on Pakistan* (Thacker and Co., 2nd edition, 1945), p. 17.

can identify an Untouchable by mere skin-colour. So the Indian untouchability is not a problem arising out of colour prejudice. It is a mental problem created by the caste system. That makes it one of the most serious problems in the world. But no world body, the UNO, International Court of Justice, or the Human Rights Commission has ever bothered about the Untouchables. In sheer numbers they excel the American Negroes, the Palestinians or any other struggling group. It is a world problem of the greatest importance and the highest priority. The only people to spare some thought for Indian Apartheid are the Christians. The World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia have done a lot. If Christians are interested in saving India and thereby the Untouchables they will have to intensify their efforts.

Class and caste : India's twin great divide

While every other country in the world (barring Communist countries) is divided into rich and poor (by class division to put it in Marxian terminology), India has not only its rich and poor but also its high and low castes. That means in India people are not only divided horizontally into rich and poor, but vertically into high and low caste—one cutting across the other. That means the Brahmin belonging to the highest caste may be poor but an Untouchable government minister like Jagjivan Ram may be quite rich. This is a most baffling problem faced by no other country in the world. If other countries have to destroy only "classes", we in India have the twin menace of "class" and "caste".

Since the loyalty of both the rich and the poor are first to their caste, it is difficult to unite the poor of a caste against the rich of their own caste. The frequent "caste wars" in India have conclusively proved that poor Hindus will not join hands with Untouchables—who are economically the poorest and socially the lowest. Therefore, India presents a paradox where no general mobilisation of the poor is possible. Even Islam and Christianity have not escaped caste divisions because originally

they were also Hindus. Sociologists by and large endorse our opinion that in India 'caste' is a 'class'. A mobile caste is a class. The low castes are all poor and higher castes are generally rich.

In India it will not be possible to launch a "class struggle" without first destroying caste. A simultaneous "class-caste struggle" has to be launched. But our Marxist comrades do not agree with this argument. The Hindus are also not prepared for this. Since Hinduism is the other name for the caste system, any attack on caste means a direct assault on the property and privileges that caste brings. Since every caste and sub-caste stands to benefit from this grand system, no Hindu is prepared to give up caste.

Currently high caste Hindus are making lot of noise over the mass conversion of Untouchables to Islam. To prevent it they say they want to destroy untouchability. Hindu leaders including Gandhi say that they want to eradicate untouchability. But nobody is complaining against the caste system, because they know that untouchability is part of the caste system. It is not possible to remove untouchability without destroying the caste system, which in turn means destroying Hinduism. So when Gandhi and other Hindu leaders speak against untouchability, they are not sincere. Gandhi, whom Ambedkar described as a Hindu leader and enemy number one of Untouchables, wanted a patchwork solution. Gandhi was content with reform. But Ambedkar wanted revolution and asked Dalits to quit Hinduism and go in for conversion.

Possible solutions

There are three possible solutions to the situation of the Dalits.⁴ There is the political solution, through a class struggle aimed at overthrowing the system. The Untouchables and tribals are born revolutionaries. Nobody wants revolution more urgently than they. Since India is one of the poorest countries in the

4. The term 'dalits' means 'suppressed or 'oppressed' and is preferred to the term Untouchables or harijans.

world, all the factors necessary for revolution exist here. The Marxist parties are about fifty years old, and are a force to be reckoned with. But the country is nowhere near revolution and the Marxists have no programme to attract these oppressed groups.

The problem is that the Marxist leadership is in the hands of Brahmins who are not ready to launch a struggle to destroy caste as it will affect the property and privileges of their caste. Without destroying caste it is not possible to destroy class. They are not prepared to combine a caste struggle with the class struggle.

There is secondly the economic solution. This solution has been in operation for a number of years with the policy of reverse discrimination which reserves a specific percentage of educational and employment positions for the Untouchables. In the years since Independence, the position of Untouchables would have dramatically altered had the policy of reservations been properly implemented.

Thirdly, there is the religious solution. Religious conversion is possible since it is an individual affair. The political and social solutions require the co-operation of the high caste people. But such co-operation is not needed for religious conversion. Thousands of Untouchables and tribals therefore have embraced Christianity and Islam. The flow is increasing. The Untouchables of India are subjected to torture not because they are poor. The country has over 50% living below the "poverty line". Untouchables are only a part of them. But Untouchables alone are subjected to torture not because of their poverty, but because of their degrading social status. The problem of poverty and exploitation in India is due to social causes and not to economic factors.

The social degradation of the Untouchables has had religious sanction under Hinduism. So they seek fresh air under other

liberating religions : Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Buddhism. Therefore conversion to other religions has become popular among the Untouchables, not because after conversion to Christianity and Islam the problem of poverty is solved. To them poverty is not their number one problem. People cannot live by bread alone. They want the self-respect which is denied under Hinduism. They will get it the moment they get out of Hinduism and convert to other religions.

Untouchables have discovered that conversion helps them since they are then no longer subjected to atrocities. Conversion to other religions helps the Untouchables to destroy caste and helps them to go to the next phase of "class struggle". Ambedkar chose Buddhism after twenty years of thought on the subject. But unfortunately Buddhism, having been considered a part of Hinduism, has proved to be ineffective in destroying Untouchability. Those who embraced Buddhism along with Ambedkar are still treated as Untouchables by the Hindus. So the Untouchables mostly prefer Christianity. Lately in Tamil Nadu, the trend is towards Islam.

The role of Christians

Those who went over to Christianity carried their caste with them. We have evidence that to gain more members, church leaders allowed the converts to keep their caste identity. There are even today separate graveyards in the church for Untouchable converts.

But Christianity and Islam do not sanction caste distinctions. Anybody fighting against caste within the church or Islam will get the support of their religion. But not so under Hinduism. That is why inside the church in India, there is a powerful movement to fight caste discrimination. Despite the caste distinction the Untouchable converts to Christianity are today emotionally and psychologically much better off than their counterparts who preferred to stay behind in Hinduism.

The latest trend towards Islam in Tamil Nadu, the southernmost state of India, is a development that has rattled the Hindu clergy. There are fresh moves to ban conversions and stop the flow of foreign funds to India. There are charges that Arab countries are financing the conversion drive. But the investigation did not prove it. Only a few thousand Untouchables embraced Islam in Tamil Nadu and mass conversion to Islam is not new in this area. But orthodox Hindus, are worried about this trend because a Hindu considers Islam as the most inveterate enemy of Brahminism. Islam has no caste distinction. The Untouchables are attracted to it because of its egalitarianism. Even some Christian converts have opted for Islam.

Hinduism is anti-human

The above account should be sufficient to convince anybody that Hinduism is not only anti-democratic but anti-human. Even the Brahmins, the custodians of Hinduism, have not benefitted materially from this religion. Hundreds have fled "holy" India and settled in "unholy" US, UK and Gulf countries. Quite a number still complain of poverty in India. Foreigners are likely to be deceived by the propaganda of non-violence, the Gandhian Ahimsa. But as representatives of the Untouchables, we would like to dispel this myth.

Hinduism is dying. Christianity and Islam have a better future in India. Urbanisation and scientific development have set fire to the very citadel of Brahminism. Two props keep dying Hinduism alive: the caste system and the Karma theory — the belief in rebirth and predestination. Hindus talk about democracy and socialism. But "majority rule" in India has resulted in a tyranny over the minorities who are reduced to the level of second-rate citizens. India will soon plunge into a bloody communal and caste war. Christianity has helped millions of Untouchables to get liberation. Because of Christianity the tribes of North Eastern India are today a

force to be reckoned with. All those who went over to Christianity are definitely better off than those who stuck to Hinduism. If Christianity is to attract more followers, it has to immediately set its house in order by getting rid of caste within the church. Secondly, they have to render all-out help to Untouchables and tribes.

Solution

The Untouchables of India are so weak—socially, economically, culturally, politically and even physically — that they no longer have the patience to wait for a revolution which has proved elusive. Therefore instead of waiting endlessly for the revolution, they have decided to seek their own solution to their problems. The first and the foremost programme is to quit Hinduism and seek refuge in any religion that assures them social status. Secondly, they will fight for a separate state. They are currently scattered all over India and live in isolated ghettos. Being in a minority, thoroughly disarmed and totally dispossessed, they face danger to their life, property and the honour of their women. So to get safety and security they have to seek a separate state. Pending such a statehood, Untouchables are migrating to bigger cities. Organised shifting of population is also planned. Thirdly, every Untouchable is asked to carry arms for self-protection. Fourthly, international organisations and particularly Christians and Muslims have a duty to support the liberation struggle. This struggle needs to be linked up with the other struggling groups of Blacks, Burakus, Palestinians, and other friends.

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8.

The Place of Women in Hindu Society

Aleyamma Zachariah

Introduction

India is a land of great diversity. It is a vast subcontinent with about 800 million people, the majority of whom are Hindus. Geographically, it is 2,933 Kilometres from east to west and 3,214 Kilometres from north to south. Climatically, while there is severe winter in the north, some of the southern states have summer throughout the year.

Hinduism is about 4,000 years old. It is an amalgamation of Aryanism, Dravidianism and Animism. Besides these three, other cultural groups also have entered India at various times, especially war-like people like the Bactrian Greeks, the Parthians, the Sakas, the Kusanas and the Huns. These were all absorbed into the Hindu community.

Though originally the Aryans had only four Varnas, now there are innumerable sub-castes, and each caste has its own culture.

It is not easy to distinguish between Hindu culture and Indian culture. Muslims and Christians of Indian origin also share Indian culture. Originally, they are all from Hindu background. In the beginning the term "Hindu" did not have a religious connotation. Any native of India was called a "Hindu". Since religions bring about many changes in the customs and manners of people, there is now an India Hindu culture, a Muslim culture, and a Christian culture. But, since all these people are Indians, customs and manners overlap.

Considering all the diversities of culture, it is very difficult to clearly define the place of women in Hindu society. In the largest cities there are both ultra-modern, sophisticated, highly educated women, as well as primitive women.

Education has naturally brought about many changes in the lives of women. But the majority of the Indian people still live in villages, and the villages are backward in education. Therefore rural women still live in primitive conditions. Many villages in India do not have even an elementary school. Hence illiterate village women are bound by superstitious customs. They are more prejudiced and less open to change.

In the towns, more women have education. They mix with people of different cultural and religious backgrounds. They are more progressive. They are married to educated men who are open for changes. These women have more freedom to move about. Many of them are not confined to the four walls of their homes. They are employed as doctors, nurses, clerks and factory workers. They are less prejudiced and more broad-minded.

In spite of all these complexities of customs and manners, it is possible to a certain extent to identify Hindu culture. We shall consider this under two sections. First, we shall consider the place of women in Hindu society according to Hindu scriptures. Secondly, we shall consider the position of women in Hindu society today.

The place of women in Hindu society according to Hindu scriptures

The *Rg-veda* emphasizes the complementary nature of women. The woman is one half which makes for fullness of the lone man.

During the Vedic times, religion consisted in performing sacrifices. A wife was expected to help her husband in performing

sacrifices. It was not possible for a man to perform the rituals without his wife. All the religious festivals had to be celebrated with the help of the wife. This gave the wife an honourable place in society. She was called Dharma-patni or Saha-dharmacharini (one who performs duties along with her husband).

During those days, girls had freedom to choose their husbands. They practised Swavamvara (self-choice). On an appointed day, the suitors used to assemble, and the girl garlanded the man she would like to marry. If she was not pleased with any of the suitors, she was allowed to remain single. Raksasa (abduction) type of marriage also existed in the Vedic age. The girl had no option. She was considered a thing, and not a person. The Rg-veda also says some unfavourable things about women. It says that lasting friendship can never come from a woman.

The *Brahmanas* say that the wife is the half which makes the life of a man whole.

The *Upanisads* say that the men find their lives incomplete and miserable without their wives. Women are created so that men can enjoy life. This shows that women were considered a means to an end. People desired male children; daughters were considered undesirable. Parents expected sons to look after their parents, and also to augment the family income. Girls have to be given away in marriage and will go away to the "in-laws".

However, a high position was given to women in the family. The household is supposed to depend upon the woman. Women alone were considered capable of managing the house. A woman's responsibilities included discipline and the moral upbringing of the children. Menial tasks were also expected of her. She was subordinate to her husband and served his interests.

However during this period, girls were eligible for Vedic studies. They were initiated into the Brahmacaryarama through the ceremony of upanayana, just like the boys. They were even permitted to stay in the house of the guru (teacher). Brahma-Vadinis (women-sages) took part in philosophical discussions. This shows that women were considered capable of abstract thinking. For example, Yajnavalkya, one of the Upanisadic teachers, was asked very difficult questions on abstruse philosophical problems by a Brahma-Vadini, by name Gargi, and Yajnavalkya requested her not to ask him any more such questions.

Dharmasutras forbid girls from studying the Vedas. So in the later scriptures there is a definite change after the Upanisadic period. By the time of the Brahmasutras, the girls were forbidden to study the Vedas. They are considered incapable of studying the scriptures. They no longer undergo the upanayana ceremony. Marriage is the initiation for girls. Discipline is to be achieved in married life. They are not permitted to pursue Vedic studies independently. The woman has no independent religious life. She has no right to perform any religious ceremonies. The wife is just a helper. Her position in the family is like that of a servant.

Why did the status of women go down after the period of the Upanisads? Some scholars advance the "racial-purity-theory". As the Aryans came into close contact with the Dravidians, it may have become necessary to make some restrictions. The two races probably had different moral standards. The Aryans did not want to suffer any moral degeneration or intermingling of races.

During the period of the *Dharmasutras*, girls did not have any voice in the matter of their marriage. The father made the decision. The Brahma form (gift conception) of marriage came into vogue. According to this form of marriage, it was the duty of the father to give away his daughter in marriage. If the

father failed to do his duty the girl had the right to choose her husband three years after she had attained marriageable age. She could make her own choice if she had no guardians.

However, Grahasthasrama (house-holder stage) is praised in the Dharmasutras. Marriage is not a concession given to human weakness, but a necessity. It is necessary both for the man and the woman. Both pursue Kama (desires). Sannyasa (asceticism) is not recommended for all, but Grahasthasrama is for all.

A wife is instrumental for a man's achievement of moksa. The husband aspires for moksa with the help of his wife. Both men and women are to pursue the supreme end of moksa. A husband becomes instrumental for his wife's achievement of moksa. A wife realises moksa by serving her husband as her God and Lord. The husband is giving a chance to his wife to achieve moksa. Therefore, husband and wife are complementary to each other. It is ahankara (arrogance) for him to think that he is superior to woman. He should get rid of his ahankara if he is to achieve moksa.

Dharma - Sastras : Manusmrti

Manu is very hard on women. Speaking on the duties of women he says, "Though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife". (verse 154)¹

He condemns re-marriage for widows. "A second husband is not anywhere prescribed for virtuous women". (162) "A woman who remarries will enter the womb of a jackal and will be tormented by diseases the punishment of her sin". (164) But a man is allowed to re-marry. (168)

1. This translation of Manusmrti is from *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXV *The Laws of Manu*, translated by G. Buhler (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1964). The verse numbers are as in the text,

Manu wants men to honour women, for he says; "where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards".

However, Manu has a very low opinion of women. He says "Woman is never fit for independence". (3) Manu condemns all women as sinful, for he says "through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal toward their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded in this (world)". (15)

Manu advocates polygamy. He writes that a wife can be superseded for the following reasons: evil behaviour, barrenness, children-all-die, only daughters, quarrelsomeness and sickness. So Manu says that for any of these reasons a man can take a second wife. (80, 81, 82, 83) Evidently, he does not permit divorce, for he says, "Neither by sale nor by repudiation is a wife released from her husband". (46) So, evidently he is not advocating divorce but polygamy if there is reason for that.

However, he feels sorry for the girl who is married to a bad man, "It is better for a girl to be in her father's house than be given in marriage to a bad man". (89) He commands that "the husband must always support his faithful wife". (95)

Manu condemns raping, "He who violates an unwilling maiden shall instantly suffer corporal punishment". (364)

The Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata consider women to be very important for the welfare of society. Women are responsible for bringing up children. Woman is the pivot of society for on her depends the quality of society. Even the virtuous man depends on his wife.

In the Purusarthas the chief ends of man revolve around the woman. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha depend on the woman. The man gets all his virtue from his wife. She is complementary to man.

The Mahabharata makes some unfavourable remarks also about women. Women are not capable of enduring affection. They cannot be understood at all. They are created in order that men will be hindered from attaining heaven. Men are pure, but women will bring them down to earth.

The place of women in Hindu society today.²

Life stories of two Brahmin women from Andhra Pradesh

Vijayalakshmi was born in 1900 in an orthodox, Brahmin family at Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. She had good orthodox, spiritual parents, one elder brother and one younger brother. According to the customs of those days, her parents got her married at the age of seven. After marriage she was not sent to her husband's place because she was still a child. But within a year her husband died. So she became a child-widow and stayed at her father's home. Her parents discouraged her from continuing education and forbade a second marriage. Her uncles also opposed her education. But her brothers encouraged her to study. She studied along with her brothers at Madras University and completed her B.A. Her elder brother became a famous lawyer and her younger brother became a famous doctor. Both encouraged her to do free social work.

After her parents died her brothers encouraged her to do free service for people. She had enough wealth which her parents had given her. She was very much interested to do social work. She moved with collectors and governors, speaking about the welfare of women in society and the necessity of providing jobs for women. Her elder brother always gave her encouragement and help. She was very popular in West and East Godavari districts A.P. She promoted social work and

2. The materials given in this section have been written by several students from the South India Biblical Seminary, Bangarapet, who come from a Hindu background. They thus speak out of first hand experience of Hinduism.

collected a lot of funds both from the public and from the government. In government competitions she stood first in the state for collecting funds for social service. She started Red Cross work, and free medical centres. She took care of orphans, supplied milk and clothes and also established welfare centres. She established a number of cottage industries and provided jobs for women, arranged the sale of their goods and spent the profit for women's welfare. She established a maternity hospital. She was appointed an honorary judge. She did various services because of her brothers' encouragement. The story is evidence that a Brahmin child widow early in the century could be a public worker.

Dhanalakshmi was born in a good Brahmin family in 1936. She was the grand daughter of a Jamindar (Mukasadar). Her childhood was spent royally. Her parents and dear ones loved her very much. When marriage proposals came, her grandmother selected one of her own close relatives because she loved the boy's parents. This was a wrong choice. From the day of marriage she suffered a lot and lived a very sacrificial life. The parents felt very sorry but did not do anything because the boy was their own relative. She loved her wicked husband and was willing to suffer at his hands rather than divorce him or take him to court. Till her death she suffered a lot from him. She loved her children; so she sold her jewels and brought them up with that money. When she saw that her children were disobedient and misbehaving, she did not want to give trouble to her husband or to her children. She gave all she had to them and thought death the only solution for her troubles. She took poison and died in 1978.

"Born rich, brought up royally but died a sacrificial death". To me that story shows that basically the Hindu wife is faithful. She could have had an easier life if she had divorced him and gone and lived with her people.

The place of women in a Brahmin family in Orissa

A student gives this report of his home :

"In my family the women are treated with honour especially the older ones and the brides. It is demanded from us that we should behave properly with them. Any misbehaviour with ladies at home or outside is never tolerated. In spite of such demands for respect, I feel the role of women is not as authoritative as man's. In many ways the role of women is limited."

"My father is the head and he has to be consulted for every important matter. He has the supreme role to play. But on several occasions I noticed my mother too had the freedom to express her views and feelings. I never sensed that my mother was afraid of my father. On many occasions she did not like the decisions of my father and she told him so." This shows that there is a measure of freedom at home for a wife to express her views though the husband is recognized as the head of the family.

"Since my father had a touring job he had to be away from home most of the time. So the entire management of the house was practically done by my mother. She had to take care of every business of the house, children, education, family property and legal matters also. My mother did not work. But she was in charge of the finance. It is not that she asked for it but the situation made that to be so. I remember I had a grand-mother, but she was never in charge of anything except some family rituals. I do not remember her being consulted for any family matters. She was totally neglected. The older male members dominated the older female members."

"Family religious life was dominated and carried on by the women folk. I remember in every family ritual my grand-mother used to take the active part. She used to keep up the orthodoxy. After the death of my grand-mother my mother took that role.

The male members were not so actively involved in family rituals and religious life."³

"On the matter of deciding on marriages, the opinion of my mother was considered conclusive. On weddings and thread ceremonies the place of my mother was quite high. She was treated with respect and dignity. I never had the impression that my mother was treated as somebody inferior. Even we brothers were asked to treat our sisters respectfully."

"Women's position is honoured in my family. We were never given the impression that women are inferior to men."

Two case studies

The student then gives a case study of his sister, Mrs. M, Mr. and Mrs. M teach Zoology in a government college. They have been married nine years and have three children. The eldest is about seven years of age. Mrs. M is a couple of years senior to Mr. M in age and service. She draws a higher salary than he.

The position of Mrs. M in the family is as follows. Mr. M is a dictator and the absolute head of the family. Whatever Mr. M says Mrs. M has to obey. If she does not, then she has to hear scoldings from him. Mr. M would not care for her. He literally orders her around like a servant. If there are guests at home she has to do everything for them. All the finance is in Mr. M's hand. Mrs. M has nothing to do with the finance of the house. Even though she earns a good salary she has no claim over it. She is literally treated as a slave in and out. She has no voice at all.

Mr. M never encourages her to give any suggestion on any matter. She is treated exactly as a servant. She is the slave and her husband is the master.

3. This young man himself was a priest in a temple before he became a Christian. And he says the men folk in his family were not interested in religion.

Mr. G's sister has been married five years. She was happily married but all her happiness was shattered when she gave birth to her second set of twins, and all the four are girls. Her husband treated her badly because she gave birth to only girls. He thinks male children are better than female ones.

Position of women in the Shimpi Caste, Maharashtra ⁴

A student reports : "My mother told me that when she came to stay with my father after marriage, her mother-in-law was alive. So in the beginning for some time my father used to beat her; also he was not talking to her as he ought to."

"But after her mother-in-law died, everything changed. My father used to discuss family matters with her. It was my mother's work to take care of the household and do domestic work. She took care of the children and also helped her husband in his tailoring work. In our society it is not considered proper for a woman to work with other men. She should stay in the house."

"During religious functions married women and those who are bearing children have all rights to participate. They get half of the share of their husband. Sometimes they are even worshipped. They are honoured and they get Dakshina (present) while widows and barren women are counted unworthy persons. Even their presence is not welcomed at such occasions."

"Children honour mothers as long as they are in the home. But once they move out of the home and taste the world, their attitude towards parents changes. This happens in most cases. Only in a few cases do children respect mothers till their death. I do not know whether any woman is working outside the home. Men think that working women will dominate everyone in the home; so they will not allow anyone to marry such girls."

4. The Shimpi caste is a high caste, next to the Brahmins.

"In our village, our neighbour used to beat his wife from the time they got married. That lady's daughter will soon give birth to a child. But still her husband, brother-in-law, and mother-in-law beat her and torture her severely. She tried to run away but she could not because it is her fate that she should suffer like this. Her husband is her god and she has to worship him and obey him, whether he is wicked, cruel or a drunkard."⁵

"My own sister has to cook for a dozen people every day, do all the washing of clothes, cleaning and carrying of water. Daughters-in-law are supposed to work hard even though they become weak and sick; they have no right to complain. Since the couple stay with the in-laws, the daughters-in-law are beaten severely."

"Most demand dowry in my village; even illiterate boys ask for several hundreds of rupees in the form of dowry, whether that boy is poor or rich. If the girl is dark in complexion several thousands should be given. Otherwise nobody would marry her."

"There are two families in my village, who are our neighbours. In those families, daughters-in-law were divorced because they did not obey their mother-in-law and sister-in-law. In one case by the time the husband came to know the truth, he had already married another girl. He left the family along with his new wife. In joint families quarrels start immediately after marriage. A daughter-in-law has to face her brother-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law and sister-in-law. Sometimes all of them are against her. Seldom are they for her. They want to torture her. After some time the wife would tell her husband: 'I can't bear it, it is too much for me, I will die now whether we get less food or starve, we shall stay separate'. Then the couple move out and they really enjoy life. Some times they help their in-laws with money."

5. We see how this puts into practice what Manu taught.

"Sad to say in villages women are not really given the honour which they deserve. They are looked down upon. They are treated as slaves, servants, menial workers, labourers and sex toys. They have to take beatings till they cry out in pain."

"Barren women are counted unworthy to live in this world. The husband marries again in order to have children, because, when he dies he must have a son to pour water in his mouth. Only then can he go to heaven."

"In my village, in one case one woman did not have children. So her husband told two or three of his friends to sleep with her, but still she did not conceive. So he divorced her and married another lady. To have a child is the most important thing. Otherwise the men marry again and divorce the first wife. In our neighbouring village a very rich man has seven wives. The seventh wife bore him children. But since he has wealth, he is keeping all the seven of them with him till today. They love him and work for him."

"My sister has two children. She is treated well by everyone outside the home, but her in-laws (father, mother, brother and sister) treat her as a slave. They do not talk to her with love. One of them does not talk to her at all."

"Actually Hindu society does not have any regard for women. She is to be kept in a corner as a doll. She should not speak, defend herself, or express her views in a joint family. But couples enjoy life when they are on their own. In-laws press them down."

"They ask for dowry because they have brought up the boy and educated him. So at marriages all the expenses should be met by the girl's family. Otherwise they do not allow them to be engaged. Gold, vessels, sophisticated gadgets and all kinds of things which we need in the house are demanded. The girl's party, mother and others are treated very badly, if such articles are not given to the bridegroom."

The position of women in the Satgop Caste, West Bengal⁶

A student reports : "The position of women varies according to the family. In strong orthodox Hindu families, women are like slaves. My mother was only thirteen years of age when she was married. She did not get any education. The duties of a lady are to look after the home and children. Early morning she gets up and sprinkles cowdung on every door post and then she prepares tea for my father. When guests come she has no right to stand before the guests. She is always scared of her husband."

"Some husbands mistreat their wives if they are late in preparing food. But I have never seen it in my family, because I have seen that my parents have a good understanding with each other."

"Marriage is the biggest problem for girls because the boy's parents ask for dowry. At the time of marriage the lady has to wear the red mark on her forehead and from that time onwards she has to always cover her head. She has to respect her husband's elder brothers. She must not stand before them or show her face. If she does that, the elder brother and others think that she is a bad character."

"My mother has full authority to control all her daughters-in-law. Ladies mostly worship all their household gods and goddesses. Hindu ladies are usually more spiritual than their men."

The role of Hindu women in a Harijan family

"Women play an important role in the religious life of the family, though they are not well informed on the truths and philosophy of religion. They take the initiative in all the religious activities. They have simple faith and superstitious

6. A high non-Brahmin caste.

beliefs. They perform all the rites and ceremonies which they learned from their predecessors sincerely and faithfully."

"They go once in a while to the temple. Mostly they perform all the worship (pujas) at home. They do not go to the temples often because once they were not allowed to enter the Hindu temples."

"Women fast on Fridays, full moon days, new moon days, and on special occasions and festivals. Fridays are important. They clean their homes, make all the Hindu marks on the door posts and they do not cook meat or fish on those days."

"Some go to the snake-mount, place eggs and milk before the snake-mounts and worship the cobra. One of my lady relatives was worshipping a cobra. The cobra used to come to her home on Fridays. She used to worship it. It was done in secret. Later her husband found out and killed the cobra."

"Each family has a family god, (Kuladevam). It may be their ancestors. Hindu women in my society worship spirits, offer sacrifices and the other things that the spirit requires. She goes to the place where this so-called god is worshipped. It may be under a tree or in their field. They specially worship the gods on Friday, full moon days, new moon days, death anniversary days, and on special festival times. They offer food, toddy, and meat before them."

"The spirit usually possesses one woman and she dances and predicts the future. They look very fierce and at such times other women come and speak with these spirits. Women worship Kali more than Shiva, Vishnu and other gods. They do all the ceremonies on behalf of their families. They do not hesitate to shave their heads to fulfil vows. They impart the fear of god to their children. They convince their husbands to join with them in their worship. Usually men are not bothered about religion in our community."

"The women in our society are now getting education. The coming generation of women may not follow the older women exactly. But they also fall a prey to all this worship. Women are more superstitious. They give religious significance for even small things like sneezing, breaking a glass or mirror, dashing your head against a doorpost and slipping or falling while walking. They more easily believe in myths. They believe in putting spells on others. They go to the astrologers first. They believe in auspicious times, like raghu-kala."

The position of women in Hindu society in Madurai Tamilnadu

The society has the following sayings about a mother :

"Worship mother; there is no temple better than a mother."
"According to the mother's quality her child will be; according to the thread, the cloth will be." "According to our mother, our taste will be." "There is a woman behind every great man, for example Shivaji and Jeejibai." "Before we know God we know mother and father." "One who obeys mother, for him there is no need to go to the temple."

An old story about mother's love is that a mother had a son who was not good. He lost his wealth. His lover asked him to bring his mother's heart. He was sad. He asked his mother to give her heart. She agreed. He killed her and took her heart. While running to his lover's home, he fell down. His mother's heart which was in his hand also fell down. The heart asked her son, "Son, have you hurt yourself? I am not alive to serve you". The son cried, "Mother" and he died. This is mother's love.

The society has the following practices. The wife is not allowed to pronounce her husband's name. Suppose a new officer goes to a home and asks a woman, "What is your husband's name?" She will not tell him. She may call her

8 year old child and say to him, "Son, tell your dad's name". He will tell his dad's name to the officer.

The condition of widows is that they should wear white sarees, in order to show to the world that they lost their husbands and that even though they lost their husbands they are pure. Society will not respect them. It is hard for them to go to marriage ceremonies, and other important occasions. Society does not expect blessings from widows. If they lose their husbands one or two years after marriage they cannot stay in their father-in-law's home. They have to return to their homes and be life long widows.

Two years ago in a home a young lady with two children lost her husband. On the tenth day her people put on her all her ornaments and garlands and dressed her as on a wedding day like a bride. The loudspeaker was turned on for music. Then she was taken to the graveyard. On the way she broke the bangles. In mid-street they gave her a bath with yellow water. They asked her to wear the widow's coloured saree. She cried. Her relatives also cried. The very sight of a widow is considered inauspicious. If a newly wedded couple is going to their relative's home, or to a temple and see a widow, they will stop and return to their place. They will not go. They may go at some other time.

The dowry system is still practised in most Hindu homes. Most ladies are victims of this evil custom. Hindus mostly still arrange marriages. Only one in a hundred may be love marriages. These are very rare cases, and mostly in the case of inter-caste marriages.

Stories concerning pure women are that in the Sathi Anasuya, if a pure married lady thinks, she can even make God a baby. She can make the sun not to rise. She can get victory over death, for example as Savithri gained Sathyavan. An example

of the ideal wife is Sita in the Ramayana. Kanaki was a pure lady. She burned up the whole of Madurai city long ago.

A proverbial saying is that only after the husband finishes his food does his wife eat. A proverbial saying has it that if your husband is a stone, it is your husband. If your husband is grass, it is your husband. Control over women is exercised in the following way. Until marriage she is controlled by her parents. After marriage she is controlled by her husband. In old age she is controlled by her son.

In most homes the husband consults his wife. In conversation if A wants to tell anything to B's wife, A won't tell it directly. A will tell to A's wife. A's wife will tell to B's wife.

In education if a town has a higher secondary school, girls are allowed to study there. But they are not allowed to go to colleges in other cities. Only very few would allow this. Most of those born in villages are still illiterate. The Brahmin community is forward. Other people get education from temples (Upanyasam), movies, television, radio, weekly magazines and other religious books (Epics). On festival days, in temples, they hear lectures and teachings concerning deities.

Only a handful of ladies are involved in politics. Some say that only women who lead immoral lives are involved in politics.

On the executive committee of temples there are only men. In public life women should walk with their heads down. In some communities ladies work in banks, post offices, and other offices. There are even women collectors. Some time ago, I asked a college graduate of a particular community, concerning her work; she said "according to our community ladies should not work in other places. My father has a shop; so I have been doing business there". She is from a well-

to-do family. In cities ladies work in offices. In some areas ladies carry on a small business at home selling ghee, milk, pounding paddy and selling rice, embroidery and making and selling cane chairs and baskets.

From childhood onwards it is taught that there are certain duties for ladies alone such as cooking, grinding flour for dosai and carrying water. Male children are not encouraged to do such work. But in most homes husbands help their wives in doing such work, for example in cutting vegetables and carrying water.

A lady who sits in a crossed-legged position is considered to be a proud lady. In some places if a boy is sitting on a bench, a lady should not sit on that bench. She should sit down or sit on another bench.

In the Brahmin community, the girls are encouraged to learn to dance. Special days are observed as follows: Friday, festival days, Karthikai and Ekadasi are important. People will not worship or go to the temples without taking a bath. Flower and Kunguman are important for women.

Treatment of widows in Hindu Society in Tamil Nadu

"In 1963 the husband of 'A' died when she was just 28 years old. However she managed with the difficulties and raised her children. When her daughter attained puberty, she made arrangements for a ceremony. In the invitation she printed her name as the hostess. Her Hindu relatives scolded her for inviting people in her name. According to the customs her husband's elder brother Mr. 'M' and his wife must take the place of parents. So 'M' and 'G' did all the other things, receiving and entertaining the guests. A widow is not allowed even to print an invitation with her name on it as the hostess.

Likewise, when the marriage was settled for the same daughter, 'M' and 'G' played the roles of the parents and 'A'

had to work behind the scene. She was forced to take second place in society. This shows that with the loss of her husband, she had lost importance in society.

Conclusion

People call India Bharata Mata. But women are not given freedom in Hindu society. They cannot use their talents.

In some places in Hindu society women are treated as slaves. They are not allowed to express their views. Women are not allowed to go to the graveyard. When anybody dies in their homes they can go only up to the front of the house. Hindu society still puts women on a lower level than men.

Lord Shiva commanded Shakti not to go to her father's home. She did not obey. She went and was insulted in her father's home, so she returned, but Shiva did not allow her inside the home. She regretted what she had done. Absolute submission to the husband is demanded of a wife.

9.

Reasons for Tensions between Hindus and Muslims

Samuel Bhajjan

The reasons for tensions between Hindus and Muslims can be listed under various headings such as historical, political, religious and social.

Hindus and Muslims blame each other for the tensions between them. Hindus look upon most Muslims as communal and Muslims look upon most Hindus as communal. It seems they are generally on different wavelengths. There is undoubtedly a wall of suspicion and mistrust between the two communities. Our politicians also broaden the gulf between Hindus and Muslims to fulfil their own ulterior motives.

A majority of Muslims has been taught from the beginning that there are many evils in Hindu religion and society. This has resulted in many misunderstandings passed on from one generation to another. Such misunderstandings sometimes take the form of religious doctrines. A lie if repeated often enough can become a truth for a section of society.

Historical reasons

Misunderstandings sometimes find their way into text books especially those on history. It is said that the history of Hindu-Muslim tensions and differences is one thousand years' old. Some historical books give the impression that the past one thousand years of Hindu-Muslim relations were mostly a tale of hatred and communal disharmony. It was seen as a period of continuous warfare between two sworn enemies. The

Muslims were pictured throughout this long period as looting and destroying the Hindu temples, raping Hindu women, mercilessly killing the Hindu population, terrorising and forcing them to conversion to Islam, illegally taking their properties, subjecting them to humiliations and heavily taxing them with the so called hateful jizya. As a result the Hindus were reduced to abject poverty while the Muslims were rolling in pomp, glory and wealth at the cost of the Hindus. This notion has been repeated so much that it has now become a matter of faith.

Even some educated people also think that most wars fought in medieval India were the result of Hindu-Muslim enmity. Some historians who propagate this idea claim that the Muslim invaders hated Hindus and invaded India simply to loot gold and silver and kill Hindus.

Muslim historians on the other hand have presented the early invaders as heroes and crusaders for Islam (Fatehun Al-Islam). The constant Muslim boasting about those heroes of Islam in writings and speeches irritates many Hindus. Muslim invaders like Mahmud Ghaznavi and Muhammad Ghori invaded India primarily to plunder rich Hindu temples and to carry booty and slave girls from India back home. They had no missionary zeal to spread Islam. But still Muslims call them heroes of Islam. The only part of their past history which the Hindus have not forgotten is that they were attacked over and over again by Muslim invaders and their wives and daughters were carried away as slaves. Their kingdoms were destroyed, their cities, towns and villages plundered and temples looted and turned to ashes. The minds of Hindu children are still fed with these stories. The result is that even a modern Hindu looks at a modern Muslim as an alien invader and oppressor. Because of this attitude on the part of Hindus, a Muslim was compelled to write: "Our Hindu brothers still refuse to accept us Muslims as Indians, as sons of the soil, at par with them. We are still taken, in the heart of their hearts, as outsiders and

invaders and this notion shapes their whole attitude towards us".¹

Even when Muslims established themselves in North India, started ruling over a vast territory and settled down, some Muslim rulers committed atrocities against their Hindu subjects and converted their temples into mosques. What does a Hindu feel when he reads an Archaeological Department note that a hundred temples were demolished to build a particular mosque near Delhi? Muslims feel that such stories have been concocted simply to denigrate and condemn the Muslim community and label them as foreigners who must be made to pay for the alleged sins of their forefathers.

Communal riots break out even now because some old temple is being used as a mosque and vice versa. Muslims living in India today refuse to be held to ransom for whatever wrong, real or imaginary, past Muslim rulers of India have done.

Muslims complain that "even now many mosques in North India are in the occupation of Hindus wherein they live unabashedly doing all the domestic chores, men sleeping with their women and women delivering their babies and walls plastered with dung cakes."²

Most Hindus blame Muslims for Partition. This attitude has also been a cause of the bad feelings. Muslims who remained in India after the Partition refute this charge. I think they are justified to do so. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in his book *India Wins Freedom* remarks that Congress leaders should be held equally responsible for agreeing to the Partition.³

1. *Radiance Fortnightly*, January 18, 1981 (Radiance is a Muslim fortnightly newspaper published by Jama'at-e-Islami from Delhi). There appeared an interesting dialogue between Hindus and Muslims in this paper on various issues of the year 1980 and 1981.
2. Mr. Athar Hussain in *Radiance*, Jan. 18, 1981.
3. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Orient Longmans, 1959).

The abundance of literature available in all languages generating violent hatred against Muslims on so many counts is clear proof of the fact that the starting point of the ill-will towards Muslims is not the Partition of the country but the very existence of Muslims on the soil of India.⁴

Hindus attach the same sanctity to Bharat as to mother. To most of them Partition was the cutting off a limb of their mother, their deity. (This concept is wholly alien to Muslims who do not approve of nationalism itself as such.) Hence the very existence of Pakistan is a constant eyesore for them. Muslims, in their estimation responsible for the vivisection of Bharat Mata, are the constant target of their wrath and anger. After the Partition, Sardar Patel is reported to have said in a public meeting in Lucknow, "there is now nothing for Muslims here. Whatever was due to them has been taken by them. There is now nothing left for them."⁵

How do the Muslims react to this kind of Hindu mentality? The following outburst is just an example which speaks for most of them.

We are here since centuries and we are here for good. Hindu brothers will have to reconcile with our existence here. Unless they do so and make their children grow with the thought that Muslims are an integral part of the Indian society, they will continue to suffer from this major irritant and will go on biting into their own flesh without being able to do anything about it.⁶

Some Muslim emperors such as Akbar and Jahangir had married Hindu women. But this never became a common practice in Muslim society. Many novels were written by Muslim writers depicting the craze of Hindu women for Muslim men. The notion behind circulating such stories was to prove that

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

Hindu women liked Muslim men for their vigour vitality and he-manhood.

Political reasons

Ninety-nine per cent of Muslims seem to believe that the R.S.S. (Rashtriya Swayam Sang), which they regard as a fanatical, communal and fascist organization, engineers riots. They think that the R.S.S. is a private army supported by rich Hindus. Hindus, in sympathy with the R.S.S. want to establish a Hindu rule and turn India into a Hindu country. This will definitely result in the expulsion of all non-Hindus or in their Shuddhi (reconversion to Hinduism). The Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, Jana Sangh, Hindu Vishwa Parishad and Shiv Sena are other political parties and organizations which Muslims consider extremist and anti-Muslim.

Hindus also believe all Muslim organizations to be strictly communalist and anti-Hindu. They refer especially to Jama'at-e-Islami which has been named as a communal and fascist movement by the Government of India. Government servants are not allowed to join the Jama'at-e-Islami or the R.S.S.

The Muslim League is also disliked by Hindus, who do not understand way the government has allowed this party to function after Partition, especially when this particular party was behind the creation of Pakistan as a separate state for Muslims.

Another factor creating tension between some orthodox Hindu organizations and the Indian Muslims is the fact that quite a large number of educated Muslims are associated with the Jama'at-e-Islami whose founder, the late Maulana Abul 'Ala Maududi, was a Pakistani national. Although the Jama'at-e-Islami of India is an autonomous body and has no formal links with the Jama'at-e-Islami of Pakistan, their ideologies are similar. Iqmat-e-Din (establishment of Islam) is one of the main objectives of the Jama'at-e-Islami.

Muslims in Pakistan are dead set against the slogan of Akhand Bharat raised by some Hindu organisations. The concept behind this slogan is to re-unite Pakistan and India into one big Hindu country. Hindu papers publish articles in support of this concept. Muslims in Pakistan retaliate by abusing Hindus for their evil designs against Pakistan. This sad situation grieves many Hindus in India. Indian Muslims feel that they are held responsible for this kind of tense situation. Sankarachari Kurtoki, a one time leader and president of the Hindu Mahasabha, proclaimed that "India belongs to the Hindus and the Muslims who are only guests should learn to behave like guests."⁷

One Mr. Hardayal, a former member of the All India Civil Service wrote :

I declare that the future of the Hindu race of Hindustan and Punjab rests on these four pillars : (1) Hindu Sanstha (2) Hindu Raj (3) Shuddhi of the Muslims and (4) the conquest and Shuddhi of Afghanistan and the Frontier. So long as the Hindu nation does not accomplish these four things, the safety of the Hindu race will be impossible.⁸

Indian Muslim journals and newspapers regularly publish articles on the renaissance of orthodox Islam. They commend those countries in which attempts are being made to establish a new Muslim society based on the Holy Qur'an and the Shar'ia : Ayotullah Khomeini's efforts to strengthen the Islamic theocracy in Iran, and the struggle of the Muslim guerillas against the present regime in Afghanistan which is often called a Kafir (non-believer) administration.

Indian Muslims are sometimes misunderstood by Hindus for taking an interest in the well-being and progress of other Muslim countries, especially Pakistan. Hindu-Muslim com-

7. *Radiance*, November 19, 1981.

8. *Mere Vichar* by Hardayal as quoted in *Radiance*, November 19, 1981.

munal riots can also be attributed, to some extent, to this misunderstanding.

Thousands of Indian Muslims work in the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and North Africa. They earn good salaries and remit large amounts back home. Many Muslim families in India have thus got a new lease of life. New houses are being built. New mosques are being erected. Many have come out of the clutches of Hindu money lenders. Some Muslims have established large trading corporations, and film companies and erected several 70 MM theatres throughout India. Some Hindus are jealous of them. These and other factors in Indian politics have given the Indian Muslims a sense of identity and inculcated a unique missionary zeal which had almost disappeared from Indian Muslims after the Partition in 1947.

Muslims take secularism to be anti-religious. They think that Hindus are plotting behind the scene to destroy Islam by taking the country toward secularism. Hindus on the other hand demand that Muslims living in India should join the mainstream of Indian culture. This process is termed as *Rashtriyakaran* (Indianisation) by Hindus. Muslims take it to mean nothing but Hinduisation.

Hindus are also troubled when they hear that their Hindu brothers and sisters are not well treated in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Their resentment takes the shape of their dislike for Muslims living and enjoying facilities in India.

Religious reasons

Muslims use the word *Mu'min* (believer) for a Muslim and *Mushrik* (polytheist) and *Kafir* (non-believer) for a non-Muslim, especially Hindu. This notion has no doubt given birth to feelings of separatism, communalism or isolationism which are most harmful to those who hold such views.

Hindus have been referred to as kafirs in many Muslims books. The use of this word has hurt the feelings of Hindus who believe that they have a richer religious heritage than the Muslims. They have also retaliated by referring to Muslims as Malechchas (unclean persons).

Muslims are beef eaters. They were slaughtering cows up to the time of the British rule in India. This is according to the injunction of the Holy Qur'an. Hindus consider the cow a sacred animal. They even call the cow Mata, mother. The press reports that even though cow slaughter is banned in some states, Muslims living in remote villages and towns slaughter cows stealthily.

Islam is a missionary religion. Muslims have preached and converted many Hindus. Some Hindu converts to Islam use such names after their Muslim names as showing their Hindu castes. Hindus resent this practice. Recent mass conversions to Islam in South India have also created tension and friction. Hindus have also started their Shuddhi drive once again. They have reconverted many Muslims.

The Shuddhi movement, started way back in the thirties, caused a lot of trouble for both Hindus and Muslims. Many people lost their lives. The government had to take stern action against some leaders of both communities.

Muslims are obliged to go on pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia once in a life time. Every year thousands of Muslims go on pilgrimage and the government has to arrange a large amount in foreign exchange for them. Hindus have no place outside India to go to for religious purposes. They think Muslims are being given a special treatment by the government as far as foreign exchange is concerned.

Most Hindus take Muslims to be of a low moral character. They think most Muslims are womanisers and that because

their own women folk observe purdah, they look greedily at Hindu women.

Muslims generally marry within their families and close relatives. Some Hindus are under the impression that a Muslim can even marry his own sister. This is not true. Muslims do marry their first cousins but not real sisters.

Muslims are allowed to marry four wives at a time according to the Shar'ia but few Muslims ever do this. Even then Hindus fear that the Muslim population will increase at a faster rate than the Hindu. They attribute this to the fact that every Muslim has at least two wives.

Hindus are of the view that all communities should be governed by a common civil code and Muslims should be allowed to have only one wife. This has created a misunderstanding in the minds of Muslims. They feel that even the government is trying to find ways and means to change the Personal Law of the Muslims which is based on the Holy Qur'an and can never be changed or tampered with.

Muslims consider all Hindus who are engaged in money-lending on interest as evil. Usury is forbidden in Islam but Hinduism is not against this practice. The use of alcoholic drinks is allowed in Hindu religion but is strictly forbidden in Islam.

Hindus cannot understand why Indian Muslims insist on keeping the Personal Law and not their Criminal Law which is also stated to be based upon the Qur'an.

Most Hindus are obsessed with the notion that Muslim character is basically the product of Quranic teaching which does not inculcate the co-existence of different religions.

Some Hindu writers consider the Shar'ia as a crude compilation of some horrifying injunctions. When they do this they have

in mind the punishments such as the public executions, stoning a criminal to death, cutting off hands and flogging in public. Some of these punishments have now been introduced in Pakistan. Muslims in turn make fun of the Hindu worship of Shivalingam, animal gods, insects and reptiles. They make fun of the Arya Samaj practice of Nayog which to Muslims is nothing but fornication. Child marriage, child sacrifice and sati is also condemned and made fun of.

There was time when in North India Hindus treated Muslims just like Untouchables. I remember that in the Punjab where a majority of Muslims lived, some Hindus would not eat or drink from the hand of a Muslim. There were separate drinking-water booths for Hindus and Muslims on various stations in the Punjab. Even hawkers would shout "Hindu meals" or "Hindu tea" and "Muslim tea". Thank God those days are now gone. But this shows how strict some Hindus have been in practising untouchability against Muslims.

Social reasons

Muslims, because of their beef eating, are considered wild, barbaric and of aggressive nature by some Hindus. Most Hindus feel that Muslims understand only the language of strength. Muslims consider vegetarian Hindus as impotent and cowards and unfit to stand against Muslims in a fight or a battle

Urdu is taken to be the language of Muslims by Hindus although it is spoken by many communities throughout India. But since most of the Indian Muslim literature is available in Urdu, Muslims love this language and want to safeguard it. Hindus want Hindi to replace Urdu among Muslims. Muslims feel that Hindus want to destroy Muslim culture by imposing Hindi on them. "If you want to destroy a culture, destroy its language." This is how Muslims look at the language issue.

Vande Matram is not our National Anthem but it is still used in many places as such. Some years ago in all municipal functions in Bombay it was a must for the audience to rise up and sing Vande Matram. Some Muslims who objected to this were branded as anti-Indian.

Muslims do not like Hindu religious ceremonies being performed at state functions. Such ceremonies irritate Muslims who are against worshipping anything except Allah. This attitude of the Muslims is termed as "Pakistani mentality" by some Hindus. Muslims cannot understand why in a secular state a particular religion is patronised by some government officials and even ministers. The state has no religion and it should have equal respect for all religions.

Mr. Shahabuddin, M.P., General Secretary of Janata Party once wrote :

Tilak and Bhoomi Pooja in state functions are in my view against the spirit of secularism. So are idols and pictures of gods and goddesses in government offices, elevators, cars place of work etc.⁹

Another Muslim is of the view that

Muslims should protest against religious ceremonies associated with a particular religion at state functions. I am even against ritual reading of scriptures of all religions at such functions.¹⁰

Some opposition parties have no programme to catch the imagination of the people. The only weapon they can lay their hands on is hate Pakistan, and hate Muslims. Muslims are blamed for hoisting Pakistani flags and shouting "Pakistan Zindabad" when they take out processions or hold special functions of a religious nature. Muslim young men are blamed

9. *Radiance*, May 31, 1981.

10. *Radiance*, May 24, 1981.

for showing their joy at Pakistan's victories against India in cricket and hockey matches. They are called disloyal to India. Muslims are justified when they complain that "any two-penny, half-penny Hindu feels entitled to question the loyalty of any Muslim, to cast aspersions on the patriotism of any Muslim, even the noblest."¹¹

When Hindus take out a procession which passes through a Muslim locality they make it a point to shout slogans such as "Pakistan Murdabad" and "Jai Bharat". This causes tension and sometimes triggers a riot.

Hindus feel that Pakistan mentality is behind every Muslim grievance. Communal riots are started by Muslims. Islam and nationalism are contradictory to each other. Muslims are not clear in their minds whether they are Muslims or Indians. A Muslim replies back by saying that "there is no clash between the two identities. If India was in danger I was an Indian first and Indian last. And if Islam was in jeopardy, I was a Muslim first and Muslim last."¹²

Some grievances of the Indian Muslims are that there is discrimination against Muslims in government service; the Hindus are plotting to throttle Urdu; the government intervention in the affairs of the Aligarh Muslim University is a threat to the minority character of the university; recurring communal riots which take heavy toll of Muslim life and property are mostly triggered by Hindus who want Muslims to leave India.

Some special complaints of the Hindus are that some Muslims shout "Pakistan Zindabad" simply to tease Hindus; they cheer Pakistani cricketers; they attack police and PAC at the time of riots; they insist on retaining polygamy and they are not returning temples converted into mosques.

11. *Radiance*, May 31, 1981.

12. Mr. Athar Hussain in *Radiance*, Jan. 18, 1981.

10.

A Closer Look at the Causes, Effects and Implications of the Meenakshipuram Conversions

G. Raveendran and Jayakumar K. C.

Introduction

Salaam alekum !—that's how you would be greeted if you were to walk into this tiny hamlet of 325 families now called Rahmed Nagar (earlier Meenakshipuram). Lying 1/2 a mile from the Shencottah to Thirumelaikoil main road, the village has made sensational news since February 1981. Reports say that there have been about 2,000 visitors to this village. Visitors include politicians, research students, Hindu Swamijis, Journalists, Muslim friends and several other inquisitive people. Mr. Makwana (Home-Central Cabinet), Mr. Vajpayee, who requested the converts to return to the parent religion, Mr. Subramaniam Swamy who distributed clothes for the 10 families which remained in Hinduism, Mrs. Maragatham Chandrasekhar of Congress-I were some of the politicians. The President of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, and several other Swamijis visited this place—it was said that two of the Swamijis distributed clothes to the 80 Hindu families and had a common feast. Meenakshipuram was the focus of several articles in almost all the leading newspapers and magazines. Some viewed the Meenakshipuram incident as the "return of a petro-dollar investment"; some saw in it a device used by the villagers to voice their demand for drinking water, etc. In the bargain today the village Meenakshipuram, apart from having gained a lot of publicity, has also got a water tank newly constructed, a relaid broad road, etc.—all after the conversion.

Why all this fuss about Meenakshipuram? What really happened there? What implications has this had on the government, politics, village life, etc.? Can the church learn anything from the "Meenakshipuram experience"? This was in brief the purpose of our visit to Meenakshipuram in February, 1982, just when the 245 Islamic (new converts) families were preparing to celebrate their "day of liberation" (February 19th) one year since the ceremony of conversion took place.

A glimpse of the village

The Harijans in Meenakshipuram come from the Pallar sub-caste. There are 325 families and almost all of them are related to each other by birth and marriage. It is a very closely knit community. The people are mainly small and marginal farmers (mostly dryland) and not landless casual labourers as most harijans are elsewhere. They take several coconut trees on lease normally and make that their business. The common crops are black-gram and paddy. Economically they are better placed (although much below poverty level) than the majority of the other Harijans spread all over Tamil Nadu. At Meenakshipuram you will find a community which is educationally higher and socially more aware than most Harijan communities. It was reported that almost all the families have one or several children who have at least passed/failed SSLC (higher secondary) and above.

Two medical doctors hail from this village. Prior to February 19, 1981 except for seven families all the rest of the 325 families were Harijans worshipping gods like Mariamman. There was even one Muslim family.

Meenakshipuram is one of the four hamlets belonging to the Thenpothai Panchayat of Shencottah block. It lies about four kilometres from Shencottah and about 15 km. from Tenkasi. Meenakshipuram village is separated by a road from

Thevar village with which they have constant rivalries. The village has a government elementary school. Today this village has been renamed as Rahmed Nagar consequent to the conversion. There are two temples, and a church was just being constructed.

What happened—the “Meenakshipuram experience”

Journalists have given various versions of the Meenakshipuram experience. The villagers, especially converts, are so fed up of these “damaging” reports that all outsiders are referred to the Jamad officials for all information (we successfully managed to free ourselves from this limitation).

For 30 years the 325 Pallar families tolerated the inhumane attitude and treatment of the nearby Thevar community, the police and the larger world but did so with clenched fists and teeth. It was reported that as early as 1952 the local young people initiated an effort to change over to Islam—but this was objected to by their elders. The effort was repeated in 1968, meeting with almost the same opposition. In 1976 a few determined youths led by the brother of the man who is now treasurer of the (newly formed) Jamad society, approached the South India Ishaatul Islam Sabai (SIIS). But the Sabai informed them that the whole village must agree to such a conversion prior to the Sabai taking over.

While this was happening the police were ill-treating the villagers through constant police raids. It was mentioned that any murder or theft anywhere nearby (including villages 10 km. away), would immediately be followed up by a police raid on Meenakshipuram. One of the young people remarked that the sight or sound of a police vehicle would send all the villagers into hiding.

January 1st, 1981, was one such day. On that day there was a murder in a village called Malkarai which lies enroute

to Sabari Malai; consequent to this murder, the police arranged for a raid on Meenakshipuram. Terror was unleashed on the so-called suspects and a few were arrested. This incident proved to be the straw which broke the camel's back. Reacting to the raid, the terribly discouraged villagers sent telegrams to various officials and the State Chief Minister too. But of no avail! The alternatives they faced at that moment were either to retaliate with violence or change/improve their social status. They chose the latter and the tool they found was religion. Sociologists would call the Meenakshipuram experience a dramatic instance of Sanskritization wherein a lower class/community strives to achieve upward mobility (social recognition and respect) by adopting the practices of higher class/community (in this case, religion, name, nature of worship, etc.). Surely seen in this perspective Meenakshipuram was more than just mass conversion—it was a silent revolution or social uprising!

The Pallar Community were totally frustrated with the way they were treated by the larger world. They were addressed with disrespect. Even high caste Thevar children called elderly Harijans by the disrespectful term 'yaalae'. These Harijans had to get up from their seats in a bus if a high caste man was without one. Most of them repeated their woes in getting water from a hand pump installed by the Panchayat—unfortunately in the Thevar village—their long waits, their fights, and the preference for high caste people. Once or twice in retaliation the people from Meenakshipuram damaged this hand pump.

Having gone through these agonies and not being able to set right the cause of the agonies any other way, they chose religion. At the end of 1980 they met the leaders of the SIIS and submitted the signed request of 325 families to embrace Islam. By collecting a subscription of Rs. 10/- from each family, along with donations from friends and a contribution from the SIIS, they arranged for a very special

conversion ceremony. At the ceremony in the presence of SIIS leader and Muslims from nearby villages, members of 240 families took the Khalima (oath). About 80 families backed out of their original request for conversion. It is reported that it was these 80 families that the All India Hindu Maha Sabha "reconverted". In reality they were never converted into Islam. The oath was followed by a feast. Later a few more families became Muslims "coincidentally" in the presence of an ambassador from a gulf country. Over 300 adults and children have undergone Sunut (circumcision) so far, and many more have changed names.

While caste discrimination and the police raid on January 1st 1981, seem to be major reasons for the conversion, there are also "reports" of petro-dollar involvement in the whole affair. It appears that there was some money involved in the conversions. But it is not clear whether the money provoked conversion or was an unexpected gift, and whether it was petro-dollars or Indian rupees. It was explained to us that the Koran teaches that if a man who has wealth helps the "have nots" with their children's schooling to learn Arabic (or in the case of converts to do Sunut), they would receive "Ahar" (heaven) from Allah. The treasurer mentioned that approximately Rs. 1,50,000 was collected as donations from people outside Meenakshipuram and Rs. 41,000 approximately was collected from people within Meenakshipuram—of which Rs. 38,000 has been used. The money is held in a bank account maintained by the Jamad of Meenakshipuram. The treasurer maintains a small note book as his cash book.

Further, the local converts have applied for permission to construct a mosque and to acquire a telephone. The Jamad also has recurring expenses like salary for a Moulvi (Islamic teacher) Rs. 400, Jamad Manager (Mr. Md. Muqdul deputed by SIIS) Rs. 300 p.m., a Lady Moulvi Rs. 200 p.m. and for the maintenance of the newly purchased 1.75 acres of land.

Obviously there seems to be a lot of big money involved although the source, timing and purpose, are not clear.

Although we are not sure whether money was used (extensively) or not, it is obvious that the converts have strong feelings about caste discrimination. Money would have been only a secondary consideration compared to their longing for deliverance from exploitation.

Follow-up

Immediately after the conversions, the SIIS has taken some quick steps to consolidate the conversion experience. All these steps are with the agreement and deep appreciation of the converts. The converts welcomed the newly enforced discipline.

The converts were organised and a Jamad committee was formed, subscriptions were instituted and followed up. All queries on the conversions were to be answered by the office-bearers of the committee. The committee is being groomed to take over fully from the SIIS deputed manager who will remain there until the mosque construction is completed.

The SIIS arranged for Islamic education by appointing Moulvis, both for men and women. Realising the need for knowledge of their faith they place much emphasis on this educational aspect. The adults are taught to memorize koranic verses in Arabic while over 150 children (60 more waiting) are sent to Madarsas spread all over Tamil Nadu for special koranic/academic education.

Apparent changes

If you were to visit Meenakshipuram today you would be greeted with the Muslim greeting of Salaam alekum. Women cover their heads and do not attend worship. The men have caps and have also grown beards (so as to resemble Prophet

Mohammad). Young children, especially those attending Madarsas wear lungis.

Because of the discipline of the Islamic religion and the determination of the converts not even one individual drinks (liquor) in the village. We heard several converts mention that all of them have stopped drinking.

Another instance of marked change is their attitude to Pongal—a Tamil harvest festival. On Pongal day all the Hindu families (non-converts) had whitewashed their houses with red stripes. It was obvious that the majority did not celebrate Pongal. When this was pointed out to the converts they said they were no longer interested in Pongal but would celebrate only the birthday of the Prophet.

Apart from these changes there was a change in the way people addressed them (as *bai* or *annan*). Muslim tea shops gave the new converts tea from ordinary cups, and there were 4 or 5 marriages between Muslim girls from Vadakarai and these new converts. As a result of effective teaching several adult converts quote koranic verses.

Politically the villagers have changed their affiliation from DMK, ADMK and Congress-I to Muslim League. A Muslim League flag flutters at the entrance of the village.

Understanding the mind of the oppressed

The conversions arose mainly from the frustration of being an exploited community. The visit proved to be an interesting learning experience to understand the mind of the oppressed. Here are some aspects which emerged from interviews :

Q : *Why did you consider Islam better than Christianity or Buddhism (apart from Hinduism) ?*

A : Hinduism has many Gods, expensive religious ceremonies plus caste discrimination.

Buddhism is not common in India.

Christianity has one God, but caste discrimination is also there.

Muslims have one God and no caste discrimination. We were looking for a religion with

- one God
- less expensive religious ceremonies
- no caste discrimination

Q : *Do you think that you have achieved social recognition and respect ?*

A : Yes, because now

- we have been given girls from nearby Muslim families in marriage for our boys.
- we are being called annan or bai now.
- the other Muslims nearby participate in our village life.

A perusal of the above reveals that the oppressed measure social mobility by (a) marriage, (b) the way they are addressed/called, and (c) solidarity from among new peers.

Q : *What benefits have you received since joining Islam ?*

A : We have received/we perceive these as benefits.

- less expensive religious ceremonies.
- equality solidarity among Muslims.
- cleanliness practised during worship.
- women (considered unclean) are excluded from worship.
- total abstinence from consuming liquor.
- about 150 children are enabled to lead a disciplined life.
- at least our children would be known as Muslims and called as bai or annan.

Will conversion stop now ?

When asked this question their reply was that years might go by, people would forget that a Meenakshipuram existed, but they would not turn back. Their determination is clear when we see the way they encourage their children to learn the

Koran and the way they attend the *namaaz*. The manager of the Jamad mentioned that several hundreds come to *namaaz* on Fridays. On other days the beating of the drums announce worship times and those in their fields clean themselves and worship Allah. The converts believe that the remaining 80 families would become Muslims soon. But the Hindus, although happy about the benefits which have emerged from the conversion (water tank and road) have no plans to go in for conversion.

During our discussion it was pointed out that the villages nearby also have problems of exploitation and police atrocity and they warned that conversions would be repeated in all the villages.

If we pause to consider what is happening around us, we might see that the Dehuli and Sadhopur (U.P.) massacres and the Meenakshipuram conversions have certain common factors. Both were incidents of the exploited lower caste communities desiring and taking action to stop exploitation. At Dehuli it was violence (which was reacted to with violence by higher caste) and at Meenakshipuram it was conversion. Communities and people who have so far been exploited are rising up. There are bound to be large and more frequent social uprisings, some via conversion, some via violence.

And Christians too !

Krishan Kant in his article "Conversion is not the answer" in the magazine *Onlooker* writes, "It is not only Hindus of Meenakshipuram but also Christians who have taken to Islam". Several newspapers and magazines majored on this information that even Christians embraced Islam. There were about 7 Christian families and their main reason for conversion was "all the rest in our village did it too". They further rationalised their switch-over by stating that "Christianity and Islam are the same, Jesus is also accepted among Muslims!"

For over 30 years the Salvation Army ministered in that area. Later the St. Thomas Evangelical church entered and the S.A. withdrew. Describing the work of church at Meenakshipuram, one of the Hindu converts mentioned. "the church appointed only low caste preachers to visit Meenakshipuram every Sunday and give payasam to Christian families on Christmas day". Explaining their point they mentioned that if the church is really keen on removing caste, why did they not send high caste people to churches here? It was also obvious that the church did not get any further than Sunday preaching and payasam at Christmas. Several people quoted their knowledge and experience of the church practising caste discrimination. One of them even mentioned immorality in a nearby church - sponsored Vocational Training Centre and the way that Centre appoints only Nadars on its staff.

On the whole the public image of the church seems to be very low. The knowledge of the Christians about their religion was very low. Due to these reasons Christianity failed to provide a possible alternative to Hinduism or Islam when Meenakshipuram made its decision.

How did the larger world react ?

For the government Meenakshipuram was an eye-opener ; to the opposition, mud for slinging; for the journalist it was news for headlines and cover story; for research students, thesis material. But what effect has it had on Meenakshipuram ?

The government has promulgated Sec. 144 restricting gatherings and they have set up a police station with 14 members in it in Meenakshipuram.

The RSS organised a conference on the 15th August 1981 near Meenakshipuram and it is alleged that they were planning to unleash violence on Meenakshipuram - but were foiled by the timely action of the Collector.

Implications

The visit to Meenakshipuram brought to the surface several issues which need our response as children of God believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. We would like to present some of them for prayerful consideration and (if found useful) for action.

Consider the basic motivation among those converts to embrace Islam. They seemed to be lifting their clenched fist in revolt against perpetual exploitation since they belong to the imposed low caste status. This is true in several parts of India and is spreading all over our land. What is our response?

- 1) As the church in India and individual Christians we need to put an end to all caste discrimination in our collective and individual life— (especially in marriages, and the way we address and relate to the low caste). Perhaps, apart from this, national and regional bodies like various dioceses, conferences, EFI, FECI and NCCI should strive to educate the church and individual Christians against caste discrimination and expose those who practice it.
- 2) One of the statements made by a local convert really sent a strong reminder to us about one of the prayers of Jesus (as in Jn. 17 "that we may be one" — also Jn. 13 : 34, 35). He said "Christians want to spread by preaching and singing; we Muslims move forward by our unity". There is a great need in our church circles to face up to this challenge, review our work and take corrective action.
- 3) Can the church be a "voice" for the low caste, exploited and oppressed majority who are never seen and heard in the main stream of our national life (except during elections)? In most places the exploited are not looking for service and mercy but for a genuine representative. Will the church function as the unelected and unappointed representatives of these people who have no voice?

- 4) The churches, as a first step, should take all measures to review their various appointments and send pastors of high caste to places where the majority are from the low caste. This would be highly appreciated.
- 5) Further analysing the reasons for conversion as expressed by the former Christians, we found that they were not too clear as to what they believed.

We find that there is great need to educate, refresh and motivate our rural church pastors especially, to lead their churches into very good Christian education. Christian education programmes should stress on teaching the members what they believe, why they believe and the uniqueness of Christianity.

- 6) It is necessary to focus our various leadership enhancement and teaching conferences in rural areas.

Rural converts described the involvement of the church in the last 40 years as "they came on Sundays to preach and also gave payasam on Christmas day to Christian families". They did not even know the names of the various pastors who visited them over the last few years. On the other hand, the Jamad now is actively involved in requesting the government for drinking water and fighting the falsely charged criminal cases against the villagers.

- 7) We as a church at least in rural areas (where church—population ratio is small) should as a rule be concerned about the total life of the village (without waiting for funds from outside to do the big things). The church of a village cannot and should not be confined to the four walls of the church building and to Sunday. This is a western/urban understanding of church. In India religion was always intricately related to the people's villages'

every day life. And the church as an expression of the Christian religion must measure up to this expectation.

Analysing the after effects and follow-up consequent to conversion we learnt the following:

- 8) People desire discipline in their religion. Spontaneity of worship and in day to day life style seemed to have been imported from the West through the Indian urban intellectuals. At least in churches in rural areas, discipline with regard to worship, church attendance and life style is very much desired.
- 9) Village elders expect that their children sent to outside hostels will come back with a disciplined life style. Most of the converts were boasting about the discipline seen in the children sent to Madras. Our Christian schools and hostels should lay special emphasis on inculcating high standards of discipline apart from Christian education among their students.¹

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II.

Dialogue with other Religions – an Evangelical View

Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden

Introduction

A vital context for proclaiming the gospel today is the context of religious pluralism. This requires engaging in dialogue with religions in our context. By dialogue we mean being open to other religions, to recognise God's activity in them and to see how they are related to God's unique revelation in Christ. We do not mean a process which carries the assumption that all religions are the same, nor that they carry within them an essence from which we can create one universal religion to which Christianity would be a mere contributor. The goal of dialogue is to affirm the Lordship of Christ over all life in such a way that people within their own context may recognise the relevance of that Lordship to them and discover it for themselves.

As evangelicals have not yet entered into the process of dialogue, a prior task must be to outline an adequate methodology for evangelical theology in addressing world religions. It appears that the *kairos* has come to engage in such a task.

Historical perspective

The focus of the international missionary conferences at Edinburgh in 1910 and in Jerusalem in 1927 was according to Archbishop Simon Lourduswamy :

how to communicate the Gospel to men of other religions. The initial attitude was one of confidence :

only Christianity could survive the shock produced by the scientific and technological changes which broke down religious customs and traditions on which religions like Hinduism were supposed to be based. The principal questions proposed for study were : What are the sources from which men whose minds have been moulded by other faiths than Christianity draw strength and comfort ? In what ways does Christian revelation deepen, enrich and supplement the insights given by other faiths ?¹

The Tambaram Conference of 1938 moved the debate on. The uniqueness and incomparability of Christian revelation (as distinct from Christianity) was the main point of emphasis. In his preparatory volume for the conference *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, Hendrik Kraemer insisted on the strict discontinuity between non-Christian religions and Christian revelation : non-Christian religions had to die and be replaced by Christian revelation. But this Christian revelation to be grown in non-Christian cultures was decisively not the same as western Christianity.

Kraemer outlined four clear guidelines for this process of developing Christian revelation in non-Christian cultures.² His first principle was the principle of "Evangelistic Adaptation". Christian truth must be "expressed against the background of, and in conflict with, the moral and religious context of the non-Christian religions" (p. 308). Paul and John are our models for such adaptation : they "expressed and formulated the essential meaning and content of the revelation in

1. 'Meeting of Religions I Indian Orientations' by Archbishop Simon Lourdu-swamy in *Meeting of Religions* edited by Thomas A. Aykara (Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1978) p. 8.

2. This summary is from M. M. Thomas in 'Christ-Centred Syncretism' in *Varieties of Witness* edited by T. K. Thomas and Preman Niles (Christian Conference of Asia, n. d.). The page references to Kraemer are from *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (International Missionary Council, 1947).

Christ against the background of and in conflict with the moralistic and legalistic conception of religion in Judaism, and with the naturalistic and gnostic mysticism of the paganism of that time" (p. 308).

The second principle was the legitimacy of different incarnations of Christianity. "Europeans can proffer no reasonable objection to adaptations in the sense of various characteristically Asiatic or African expressions, because their own national and regional Christianities, which they often cherish highly, are all adaptations" (p. 313). To posit one or more of the historical forms of Christianity as its finality would be "one of the most subtle forms of idolatry".³

Thirdly, Kraemer defines syncretism as an amalgamation of religious elements without reference to the criterion of revelation. Kraemer identified such syncretism in the following approaches: "To assimilate the cardinal facts of the revelation in Christ as much as possible to fundamental religious ideas and tastes of the pre-Christian past" (p. 308) is syncretistic. The attempt to substitute scriptures of other religions in place of the Old Testament is also syncretistic.

Fourthly, Kraemer "points out that the history of the 'adaptation' of Christianity after the New Testament period is generally mixed with a good deal of syncretism... 'The whole history of Christian dogma, is so to speak, the story of the perennial tension and war between the mysterious wisdom of God in the acts of Revelation and the various foreign tongues' (p. 327). Syncretism universally remains a constant danger to Christian authenticity".⁴

3. In 'A New Theology from Latin America' *The Churchman* 88:2 (April-June 1974), p. 114, Andrew Kirk makes just this point about the incarnation of the gospel in the social milieu of Latin America; that the authority of the scriptures must not be identified or linked with one particular set of dogmatic formulations of the gospel. Evangelicals have heard Kraemer in the social milieu; we need to hear him in the religious milieu.

4. M. M. Thomas, *Varieties of Witness*, op. cit., p. 11-12.

The younger churches in the former "mission fields" were encouraged and released by Tambaram and by Kraemer's advocacy of evangelistic adaptation, to take their contexts seriously in framing their mission. Their contexts were the end of the colonial era, the political independence of their nations and their own independence from the sending churches. The younger churches in the Two Thirds World found themselves as independent entities in newly emergent nations. Due to their origin in western missions and links with the colonial rulers, they had to demonstrate their loyalty to the new nation and commitment to the process of nation-building. They took this to mean that the church had to be deeply involved in the quest for social justice. The churches interpreted the new found national independence to include true self-sufficiency in all spheres of life. This task required common action by followers of all religions. For the churches such common action involved a dialogue with other (often majority) religions as part of the process of building a Christianity which would be at home in the new context.

Thus the Church's understanding of mission, shaped by the challenge of the context of nation-building and of religious pluralism, extended beyond verbal proclamation to involvement for social change in the context. The denominational missionary societies in the West which maintained links with the young churches followed the lead they gave, and allowed them to define what Christian mission was in their contexts. Thus it is no wonder that when we became the first independent nation, Paul Devanandan and M. M. Thomas made an important contribution on the world scene in this area. At the same time, parallel concern for the context in the West was giving birth to movements such as the Civil Rights movement which had a strong basis in the churches.

Mission thinking in the W.C.C. after 1948

Between 1948 and 1961 the development of mission thinking

in the W.C.C. on dialogue with other religions was according to Archbishop Lourduswamy as follows :

The focus of the problem was shifted to the anthropological context, the one common humanity, and the solidarity of all men. The central problem was the basic values of modern man as well as the interaction of changing social ideals as reflected in World Religions in their relation with the Word of God, the Biblical understanding of man and society, and the once for allness of the redemptive act in Jesus Christ... The basic outlook is stated thus : 'The Gospel is addressed to men and not to religions. Hence the question is not between Christianity and other religions nor between the Gospel and the religions, but the relationship of the Gospel to man, whatever be his religion'.⁵

Since 1961 the focus... shifted from anthropology to salvation history... In the face of secularism and humanism religions seek to provide a firm spiritual basis, and in this Christianity has to enter into a dialogue at the deepest level with other living religions on the nature and destiny of man and on the nature of ultimate truth. Here the task is not to oppose one religion to another but to acknowledge the unique contribution of each religion in the total plan of salvation by a sort of critical solidarity with men of all faiths... We cannot detach man from his beliefs... we encounter men, individuals and groups adhering to certain religions, holding particular beliefs.⁶

To the emphasis on nation-building was added the concern to take the religions of the context seriously and work with them in the process of social change, or at least to tap their spiritual

5. Lourduswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 9-10.

6. Lourduswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

resources in the process of social change. Dialogue essentially was not to attack or undermine other religions but to understand and develop a common base with them in the common task of nation-building. So, the concern to convert people from other religions became secondary at best and often did not come into the picture at all, lest it undermine the fragile commonality that was being discovered after decades of distance.

Mission thinking among non-conciliar evangelicals after 1948

A different perspective on world mission took increasing organisational form after 1948. This movement was ideologically and organizationally structured to continue the crusade of the Great Century of the expansion of the Christian faith. Its focus was on new mission fields, new converts, and greater numbers. It reacted to the post-colonial period rather than adapted to it. The movement looked for new unevangelized fields in which to carry on doing the things that it had always done.

This movement was confined largely to the western missionary enterprise and within that to the missionary societies from the United States of America. We suggest a number of reasons for the growth and increased visibility of this movement.⁷

First the transition to the post-colonial era did not affect relations between the North American missionary societies and their churches in the newly independent nations. Secondly, the enormous growth in wealth, resources and confidence of the North American churches promoted a rapid expansion of these missionary societies. Thirdly, the private enterprise view of

7. With the increasing confidence of independent nations and the increasing affluence of some of them, for example Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil and India, indigenous missionary movements are emerging from these nations which now number fifteen per cent of all Protestant missionaries. But in terms of their ideology they are only a younger church version of the same western missionary enterprise.

western mercantile capitalism shaped this expansion. The effects of these three factors on missionary expansion paralleled the activity of free enterprise business. Once one market closes down, the natural way forward for any enterprising businessman with a product to sell is to seek new markets. So with the emergence of independent national churches, who would now be responsible for mission in their own context, these mission societies went into areas where the church was not planted, among for example primitive tribes. In the fifties and sixties, the evangelism of the Auca Indians was projected as what world mission was all about. The evangelism of the Auca Indians was a brave and courageous undertaking. Our point is that the fact that it became a legend and an inspiration for tens of thousands of western Christians and displaced all the struggles of national Christians to witness to their faith in newly independent nations in the minds of the western evangelical churches, is indicative of the prevailing understanding of mission.

The Berlin Congress on Evangelism in 1966 gave visible expression to this movement. The agenda of the congress appeared to promote views which would justify a "freemarket" understanding of mission(s). The voice of the younger churches engaged in mission in the unevangelized fields of their own context was not heard. The spotlight fell instead on the Auca Indians.

This "free market" understanding of mission attempts to validate itself in two ways. First it faults the national church for not doing the task of evangelism, for diluting the mission of the church with concern for social issues, and for undermining the gospel with syncretism and universalism. This charge was made at the Berlin Congress of Evangelism in 1966. The new churches had changed both the message and the methods of missions:

The use of the term "mission" in the new sense represents an attempt to depart from the narrow verbal proclamation with evangelism considered to be ineffectual,

or ineffectual without the wider area of service. The use of the word "mission" represents symbolic departure from the heaven and hell concepts of historical missions. It represents not only a change of *method* but also of the *message* of missions.

The use of mission as the "mission of the church" has been used to describe the penetration of the values of Christianity into other cultures and religions and has, consequently, precluded the need of first winning individuals to Christ.

The "church mission" communicates the sense of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God whereby service becomes an act of reconciliation by the "church in mission." Sin is not individual but corporate deeds, alienating man from God and rending or tearing the human fabric of peace.

God according to D.T. Niles, has performed reconciling acts in all religions, to which men have responded in faith without accepting the Christian's God in Christ.

The consequences of this form of universalism lead to a syncretism of all religions and faith—a new universalism.⁸

Secondly, it claims that the Bible and mission tradition affirm that verbal proclamation of the gospel to individuals is the sum total of mission. Arthur Johnston writes:

Edinburgh 1910 saw evangelism in terms of the individual and missions; Jerusalem 1928 established a partnership between missions and the younger churches. Madras focused upon the Church universal, as the

8. Arthur M. Climenhaga quoted in Arthur Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton, Tyndale House 1978), p. 195.

divine answer to the needs of men... The entire Church should participate in evangelism... This means of evangelism—the Church—was no longer a “soul-winning” Church that supposedly concerned itself with the inward part of man, to the exclusion of his physical needs. It was the Church, rather than the individual as a disciple of Jesus Christ, which brought others to the life of the Christian community. “Personal evangelism” by the Church replaced “soul-winning” by the individual believer.⁹

According to Johnston, the authentic gospel is committed to individuals over against the church, to win souls over against personal evangelism directed towards the inward part of man to the exclusion of his physical needs. Johnston uses the above formulation of the gospel to support his claim that the tradition of mission is on the side of verbal proclamation. Not unnaturally he sees the Lausanne Covenant and John Stott's book *Christian Mission in the Modern World*¹⁰ as declensions from the biblical mission of the church.

This “free market” analysis of evangelical missions is not a new one. As early as 1900 an editorial in an Indian magazine noted :

We admire the power of these missionary gentlemen to organize and institute foreign missions as easily as their secular brethren promote joint stock companies and banks.¹¹

Developing a focus on the context

We stand in the tradition represented by the Berlin Congress. Since Berlin, increasing numbers of evangelicals committed to

9. Johnston, op. cit., p. 71-2.

10. Falcon, 1975.

11. Vedanta Brahnavadin July 1900: 607 quoted by Graham Houghton, *The Development of the Protestant Missionary Church in Madras 1870-1920* Ph. D. Thesis presented to the University of California Los Angeles 1980, p. 198 (Madras, Christian Literature Society, forthcoming 1983).

the scriptures, the Lordship of Christ and evangelism have begun to take their context seriously. At the follow-up to Berlin, the Lausanne Congress of 1974, the presentations made by evangelicals working among students in Latin America stimulated the drafting of a statement on Radical Discipleship which went further than the Lausanne Covenant in linking evangelism and social concern in the mission of the church. These Latin American evangelicals put this question firmly on the evangelical agenda. At COWE in Thailand in 1980, a concerted effort was made to put the clock back to Berlin. But at least one third of the participants, and even more according to the highest authority resisted this attempt and said so in both a Statement of Concerns, and the texts of some of the booklets emerging from the Consultation. The subject remains on the evangelical agenda and was debated at the Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR) in June 1982, eight years after Lausanne.

For the same reasons as our Latin colleagues put social action on the evangelical agenda, it is time for us to put dialogue with other religions on the agenda also. Evangelicals are still at the same place as mission thinking was 50 years ago. For example, in 1978, Ernest Oliver, a past chairman of the Missions Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship called on "faith missions" to get better acquainted with the psychological and religious sources of non-Christian religions. He spoke positively of the "strength and comfort" other faiths provide for their adherents.¹² This is the same position as was taken at the Edinburgh conference in 1910.

However, in order that the gospel might become relevant to a context, it must take the total reality of the context seriously. The context in which millions of the "unreached" live is dominated not only by poverty but also by living religions from

12 'No other Name—an Evangelical Conviction' by Waldron Scott in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, edited by Gerald Anderson and Thomas Stransky (Orbis, 1981), p. 68.

which is derived the entire value system of the world view on the basis of which people live, act and move. In addressing social change, mission strategists have been discovering a new method of praxiology and contextualization which has tremendous potential to enable us also to approach the religious context. We need to examine that methodology carefully.

A new methodology

The praxiological approach is to go into a context with deep convictions shaped by the gospel. The goal is not to apply ready-made formulations of the gospel, but to understand the focus, emphasis and the very meaning of the biblical gospel in that context.

This approach is increasingly being accepted by evangelical mission theologians, especially from the Two Thirds World. We are discovering that this process affirms the gospel and does not distort or undermine it. It brings new insights and makes the gospel excitingly relevant. It liberates rather than enslaves both the scriptures and our own persons. The process has begun to give birth to more wholistic expressions of the gospel and wholistic strategies for evangelism. Thus evangelicals have been able increasingly to affirm social change as part of the mission of the church.

Just as evangelicals working in Latin America have brought the issue of social change to the fore, evangelicals from India in the context of the plurality of religions need to bring this issue of inter-religious dialogue to the fore. For in countries where the plurality of religions is the dominant reality, social change on its own is an inadequate way of applying the gospel. The plurality of religions must also be addressed.

In the context of religious pluralism, no social change can take place without a religious reality that promotes this change. Where religion is part of the whole world view of a people,

any Christian claim to bring the truth about life must be related to their world view if it is to have any meaning and stimulate any change.

The experience of the Indian church is that lasting social change cannot be achieved unless a religious dimension promotes this change. A clear example of this is the Rural Health Project at Jamkhed run by the Doctors Arole. An evangelical leader visited them recently and noted four ways in which the villagers had become de facto Christians; that is they are not yet baptized or part of any existing church structure.

First, fear has been eliminated from the villages. Villagers used to be afraid to have surgical operations on certain days because the day was inauspicious. The Aroles taught them that God is in control of every minute of every day, so every day is auspicious to have an operation. This fear of forces which meant they could not control their own lives has gone. The villagers believe that in Christ God has come to the village to control every aspect of their life. There is no need to fear because God is present.

Secondly, there is a sense of social justice. Slowly the bitterness that arises from the experience of inequality emerges and is articulated by the villagers. Through stories of the way Jesus dealt with people and interacted with the authorities they accept that in the Kingdom of God all people are equal. So they come to see that they are equal, and that the Brahmin is not really a better person than they.

A third area is a corollary of the growth of the awareness of social justice. Women have been raised to a point of equality. They no longer live in abject fear of their husbands. Women play dignified roles in the villages. Some are mayors of their village. The premise of this is Jesus' relationship to women. The Aroles "walk" people through the gospels and show how Jesus related to women. The villagers are happy to accept

Jesus' authority as God incarnate. And on his authority, women have a new dignity and freedom.

Fourthly, each village has an awareness of the supreme God. A deity represents that in each village. This usually turns out to be some person in the village who lived four to five generations ago. That person, in essence regarded as a saint, becomes the villagers' deity. Confronted with the Jesus of the gospels, the village deity is no longer attractive. After they have gone through various phases, they have come to accept Jesus as their deity. In time, they accept the whole gamut of Christian theology of Jesus, the Son of God who came, lived worked, died and rose again.¹³

Further, other religious systems are now providing their own challenges. Kraemer maintained that the Christian faith had never been a closed system. It had constantly interacted and changed with its context. But he insisted that other religions were closed monistic naturalistic systems with only one focus. This is not so. M. M. Thomas has shown that these religions have interacted with the march of westernisation and Christianity across the world, and in interaction with them have developed a second focus as a counterpoint to their central monistic focus. They have become elliptical systems growing in tension rather than monistic systems growing round one central core. Thomas identified this process in his *Man and the Universe of Faiths*.¹⁴ The historical horizontal (man to man) and prophetic challenge of western Christianity has met a response within the vertical, naturalistic religions of the world. They have developed their own prophetic movements and their own concern for justice and society.

13. For a description of the Arole's work at Jamkhed see *Health by the People* edited by Kenneth Newell, (Geneva, World Health Organization, 1975).

14. M. M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths* (Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1975).

These religions are undergoing a form of renewal and resurgence and are developing a new confidence. They are now being imported into the very homelands of western Christianity. They are scoring significant successes. They are addressing the issues of materialism in the West, which Christianity seems to have both produced and yet apparently failed to adequately answer. Their evangelistic strategy is based on the assumption that western Christianity has failed to give a wholistic answer to all man's needs. Thus a new attempt at religious dialogue may be a real contribution to our brothers and sisters in the western church. For as we enter it in the context of India, we may well come out of it with directions and suggestions that will help the western church with its real quest.

Evangelicals are therefore beginning to see the fundamental necessity of grappling with the reality of other religions, from the basis of evangelical presuppositions, for the sake of the total impact of the gospel.

Why have evangelicals not been involved in dialogue?

Why have evangelicals been hesitant to enter this field? The current attitude among western evangelicals is dramatically illustrated by an incident recounted by Waldron Scott :

At a recent consultation on theology and mission, David Hesselgrave... called on evangelicals to review their attitude of disinterest and non-participation in dialogue... Hesselgrave had several types of dialogue in mind. These included dialogue on the nature of dialogue, interreligious dialogue to promote freedom of worship and witness, dialogue concerned with meeting human need, dialogue designed to break down barriers of distrust within the religious world, and dialogue that has as its objective mutual comprehension of conflicting truth claims.

...the response that participants in the consultation—all evangelicals—made to Hesselgrave's call... was virtually nil. Consequently Hesselgrave concluded that "for whatever reasons, evangelicals are not really ready for any of the five types of interreligious dialogue proposed in my paper". ... "Certainly until such a time as the position of evangelicals is clearly understood by both non-evangelical participants and a wider evangelical constituency, the cause of biblical Christianity, at least, is better off without their participation." ¹⁵

This incident clearly illustrates the apparent crisis of identity that evangelicals experience when the subject of interreligious dialogue is raised. Hesselgrave does not give any reasons for their diffidence. We venture to suggest the following.

The fear of syncretism

The main reason why evangelicals have not gone into the field of religious dialogue is that evangelicals have heard Kraemer's warnings about evangelistic adaptation, but not his challenges. They have made his warnings central and the substance of his argument peripheral. They are afraid that any dialogue would lead to syncretism.

This fear is not substantiated by those who take part in dialogue.

Albert Nambiaparambil writes:

Actually experience does not give any room for this doubt. Though involved in different kinds of dialogues, I have had no occasion to feel there was any such risk resulting from religious dialogues; the opposite

15. Waldron Scott in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism* op. cit., p. 66-7.

was often heard mentioned, that so and so returned home confirmed in his or her faith-commitment. ¹⁶

Dr. Lynn A. de Silva, Director of the Study Centre in Sri Lanka said, at the Nairobi session of the W.C.C. :

Dialogue, far from being a temptation to syncretism, is a safeguard against it, because in dialogue we get to know one another's faith in depth. One's own faith is tested and refined and sharpened thereby. The real test of faith is faiths-in-relation. ¹⁷

We suggest that a number of questionable assumptions about the nature of the Christian faith and other religions lie beneath this fear.

The first assumption is that both Christianity and paganism are closed systems which are both already clearly defined. The evangelical approach to other religions has been to view them as systems which are pagan, heathen and closed to the activity of God in history. They are anti-Christian systems which have no signs of redemption in them. Only the people in them are redeemable. The system itself is not redeemable. Therefore the approach is to confront the systems by hurling gospel grenades over the boundary walls in a process designed to raze the religious system to the ground. While this siege is in progress, the attacking forces rescue what inmates they can, clean them up, baptize them and then use them as front line troops in the siege operations.

An alternative approach has been to look for God-prepared "landing strips" within the system which can be used in the service of evangelism. These are cultural analogies of redemption, such as Don Richardson's example of the Peace-Child

16. Albert Nambiaparambil 'Religions in Dialogue: Indian Experience Today' in *Meeting of Religions*, op. cit., p. 81-82.

17. Quoted by Nambiaparambil, op. cit., p. 82.

among the Sawi.¹⁸ The system is still irredeemable, but from these landing strips which God has himself prepared, people can be taken out of the system.

The second assumption is the stress on the uniqueness of God in Christ at the expense of the universality of God at work throughout all history. This stress can be seen in the Lausanne Covenant paragraph 3 on the Uniqueness and Universality of Christ :

We affirm that there is only one Saviour and only one Gospel, although there is a wide diversity of evangelistic approaches. We recognise that all men have some knowledge of God through his general revelation in nature. But we deny that this can save, for men suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies. Jesus Christ, being himself the only God-man, who gave himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which we must be saved. All men are perishing because of sin, but God loves all men, not wishing that any should perish but that all should repent. Yet those who reject Christ repudiate the joy of salvation and condemn themselves to eternal separation from God. To proclaim Jesus as "the Saviour of the world" is not to affirm that all men are either automatically or ultimately saved, still less to affirm that all religions offer salvation in Christ. Rather it is to proclaim God's love for a world of sinners and to invite all men to respond to him as Saviour and Lord in the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith. Jesus Christ has been exalted

18. Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (California, G. L. Publications, 1974).

above every other name; we long for the day when every knee shall bow to him and every tongue shall confess him Lord.¹⁹

There is no grappling in this section with the issue of whether God is at work in other religions.

The third assumption is about the nature of religious phenomena. Evangelical religion is very reformed and cerebral. It focuses on faith and belief. It assumes that the same is true of other religions. So, it abstracts belief systems from religious practices and world views, and confronts them with its own belief system. Since evangelicals are already convinced that their belief system is totally right, any other set of beliefs which are not the same must automatically be wrong.

This assumption is based on a number of false premises. First, it neglects any critical basis for the analysis of religious truth. The centre of gravity of western evangelicalism as far as it impinges on missions is the United States of America. North American Christianity has in general not gone through the fires of the enlightenment and rationalist tradition of Europe. In North America the Christian religion is usually regarded as good per se until it is proved fraudulent. There is no tradition of self-critical reflection on evangelicalism as a religion, and no basis for a critical analysis of religions.

The two alternatives for the encounter with other religions are therefore perceived to be only total rejection of them or syncretism with them.

A second false premise is a failure to take account of the functions which religions and belief systems have in a society. A religion is an integral part of a world view. A world view is not just a matter of beliefs. It forms each society's basic

19. The following references are cited at the end of the paragraph: Gal. 1:6-9, Rom. 1:18-32, 1 Tim. 2:5-6, Acts 4:12, John 3:16-19, 2 Pet. 3:9, 2 Thess. 1:7-9, John 4:42, Matt. 11:28, Eph. 1:20, 21, Phil. 2:9-11.

model of reality from which the conceptual and behavioural forms (linguistic, social, religious and technical structures) find their unified meaning. Such a world view explains how and why things exist, continue or change, evaluates which forms are proper or improper, systematises and orders the varied perceptions of reality in that society into an overall integrated perspective.²⁰ Thus a world view is not just a matter of beliefs. It is the whole model of reality which is held and practised by a society. If we merely try to discredit certain beliefs, we neither understand them nor the role they play in society.

The fear of being misunderstood

A second reason why evangelicals have not gone into this field of religious dialogue is, we suggest, possibly the fear of being misunderstood. Some evangelicals have welcomed and others have at least tolerated the new interaction between evangelicals and their social contexts. Those of us involved in this interaction may be accused of getting the priorities wrong in the mission of the church. But our central identity and Christian affirmation has not been called into question. There was no question of dialogue with the fundamentals of the faith.

Because evangelicals have not worked out the uniqueness of Christianity vis-a-vis other religions, the fear is that the admission of truth in other religions raises questions about the nature of this uniqueness.

Fruitfulness in other fields

A third reason why evangelicals have not been involved in religious dialogue is that over the last thirty or forty years they have experienced great fruitfulness in missions among so-called primitive cultures. Two hundred years of witness

20. For this understanding of world view see Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Orbis, 1978) p. 53 ff.

to Hinduism and Islam has borne little fruit. So there has been a move away from them to more fruitful labour among primitive tribal peoples, and among those practising magically oriented popular religion within Hinduism and Islam.

Studies in anthropology, sociology and linguistics have been adequate for the success of mission in these areas. This success however does not imply that there was never any need for dialogue with these religions. These religions are very coherent logical systems with world views. But the mentality of mission has been to conquer these religions, and a limited range of studies has been adequate for this conquest.

But dialogue must take place with animism and magically oriented popular religion. The people who follow tribal religions and magical popular religion are non-high caste, lower economic classes, whose lives are ruled by fears of beings and spirits who control their day to day destiny. Their world-view is as complex as any other, but because of the presentation of Christ as the conqueror of all fears, they respond more quickly. This does not rule out dialogue with their world view, because as recent research has shown, converts retain a magical orientation and practices even for generations.²¹ A Christian veneer has been papered over a continuing world view which is animistic and dialogue has never taken place with their religious world view. Dialogue is thus not just an intellectual exercise in discussing conflicting views on the origin, purpose and destiny of the cosmos. It is a vital necessity for adequate Christian pastoral care.

Fear of decline in evangelism

A fourth fear is that dialogue will lead to being lukewarm about evangelism. Evangelicals can mistake fanaticism for firmness

21. For example research carried out in Madras in 1982 by graduate students in a programme of the Association for Evangelical Theological Education in India showed that, for problems of sickness and decisions, many Christians revert to astrologers, magicians and local deities.

of conviction. If we are firmly convinced about Christ we will want to see Christ apprehend others and be apprehended by them. Christology will be at the centre of our focus. The centrality of Christ would seem to be the biblical motivation for evangelism. "God has exalted him therefore..." By contrast some motivations for evangelism seem to owe more to the sociological factor to reinforce and expand one's own in-group over against other groups. This may lie behind the desire to act as those who would prevent people falling over a big cliff into a ravine. To do this more effectively they would tend to emphasize the depth, darkness and danger of the chasm. So there would be the temptation to emphasize the darkness and demonic nature of all other religions and ideologies. People with this perspective would tend to view those who did not have such a sect mentality and who did not paint such a black picture as therefore being lukewarm about the desire to win others.

But this fear is unfounded. Albert Nambiaparambil writes :

Conversions do occur as the result of dialogue; often this is in the form of liberation from ignorance and prejudices about others. Some return home more confirmed in his own religious tenets, but less fanatical.²²

Agenda for dialogue

We suggest the following possible items for an agenda for dialogue.

1. The doctrine of man

What are the assumptions about the nature of man upon which the very possibility of dialogue is based? Dialogue assumes a degree of self-transcendence of one's own religion. What concept of man is adequate to understand that a person can transcend his own religious convictions, commitments, language

22. Nambiaparambil, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

and praxis to dialogue with another religion? On what doctrine of man can we posit such a degree of self-transcendence?

Those who assert the individuality of each religious context maintain that we comprehend what we comprehend only in terms of concepts and categories given in our context. There is no conceptual experience apart from the immediately given linguistic structure that shapes our ordinary human experience. So it is with our perception of religious realities. Therefore whatever it is that is given as the gospel, is given to us in, through and never apart from the linguistic and conceptual structures of our context.

Is such a view compatible with a Christian doctrine of man, and even with the practice of dialogue? Or at the end of the day is it solipsistic?

2. What is the nature of the common ground between religions?

Both dialogue and proclamation-evangelism presume some common ground. Those committed to dialogue tend to assume that there is a common human experience of which all religions are expressions. The philosophical tradition identifies this common experience as the universal categorical moral imperative. Bimal Motilal, the Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford writes :

If we can locate an autonomous moral system which is commonly shared by the dominant religions of India, then we can explain different religious systems as only different combinations of this moral system with different world-views.²³

Many from a Two Thirds World context identify the common experience as social relationships. Satish Gyan writes :

23. Bimal K. Motilal 'Towards Defining Religion in the Indian Context' in *Meeting of Religions*, op. cit., p. 40-1.

Positively religion acts as a cementing and integrating force, preserves and sustains social relationships, and negatively it has been applied for subjugation, manipulation and domination.²⁴

Nineteenth century western Christianity of the tradition emanating from Schliermacher, and Indian Christianity of the Bhakti tradition of personal devotion, identify the commonality of religion as people's religious feelings of dependence on a higher power.

Evangelicals have by and large vigorously criticized attempts at dialogue which seek for common ground between religions because they hold that it will dilute what they perceive is the uniqueness of historic Christianity. They define Christianity by the way in which it differs from everything else.

But evangelicals themselves also appeal to common ground. Their presentation of the gospel assumes that a presentation addressed to people's reason and to their felt needs will meet with a response. They assume a common rational faculty in all people and common needs. Often they base this on an understanding of man as made in the image of God.

The whole issue of the nature and definition of the common ground needs to be addressed. Evangelicals appear to make a philosophical mistake when they define the uniqueness of Christianity by stressing its differences from other religions. This is like defining a bicycle by its differences from all other wheeled vehicles and ending up with the definition that a bicycle is a wheeled vehicle which will fall over if left free-standing. This is not a very satisfactory definition, nor one likely to attract customers.

Others who enter dialogue in order to seek a common ground and who seek to define the essence of all religions as morality,

24. Satish Gyan in *Religion and Society* (Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, June 1980) p. 2.

justice or feelings of dependence also make a philosophical mistake in seeking a definition of religion by excluding all differences between religions. This is like defining games by excluding all the differences between games and ending up with a definition that a game is anything governed by rules.

Wittgenstein suggested that definitions should be treated as a matter of seeking family resemblances rather than defining by the differences or commonalities in various groups. Thus both those who have evaded and those who have overstressed the uniqueness of Christianity in dialogue with other religions may have both been in error. We need to look again at the whole issue of what constitutes commonality in people's experience of religions and the part that it should play in inter-religious dialogue.

3. The watershed of karma

In our context people are formed by the religious world view of Hinduism. In this context, A. G. Hogg has shown in his scholarly studies that the watershed between Christianity and the Hindu world view is the concept of karma, and its corollary of the transmigration of souls and doctrine of rebirth.²⁵ The concept of karma is the concept of the just requittal of wrong, of automatic cause and effect justice. This is the issue of theodicy.

Many scholars claim that Hinduism contains all the religious concepts of Christianity except its concept of theodicy. Hinduism speaks of the knowledge that we gain of our true identity, which parallels the Christian claim that the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God. It speaks of a personal God who gives salvation through grace. The watershed is the area of determinism and responsibility. Karma is a watershed because it seems to answer the problem of suffering phenomenologically, but not metaphysically or morally.

25. See for example A. G. Hogg, *Karma and Redemption* (Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1923).

Karma, it must be noted, is not necessarily a watershed between Christians and Hindus, because many Indian Christians would hold a *de facto* Hindu world view on this point. They have baptized karma into the Christian understanding of providence. If a person suffers it must be because he has sinned. This can also dry up the wellspring of Christian compassion. Often a deep seated sense of guilt and reproach attends those who suffer. Thus dialogue on this issue is most important for the pastoral growth of Christians as well.

The Christian tradition has wrestled long with this problem. It is the central problem of the book of Job. Would the book of Job be a valuable resource for the religious dialogue with karma in Hinduism? Another area for study would be the question of the link between karma and Indian pessimism. Is karma a fruit or root of the pessimism which so deeply pervades our society?

4. Where is God at work ?

Is the kingdom of God at work in any sense in other religions? We have noted that there are many prophetic elements in other religious traditions where movements have arisen to struggle for equality, justice, the fulfilment of people and devotion to God in contrast to materialism.

Can we say not just that God has left himself a witness in these religions, but is actually at work in them? In the same way that God is at work in non-Christian movements for justice, can the prophetic movements in other religions be seen as the work of God? For example Gandhi's movement developed as a prophetic movement in dialogue with his experience of western education and western Christianity. Western Christianity has also learned from him in its quest to seek an alternative to both passive non-resistance to evil and the increasing military aggression which the just war theory seems powerless to restrain. Was Gandhi's movement a movement of God or of the devil?

This question should be one of the main items on the agenda. The central issue of dialogue is to discover where the Lord of history can be seen at work, which instrument he is using and what truths he is pointing to. Authentic dialogue on this topic will take place between those committed to change society in the direction of justice. If Christian participants speak from the reality of servanthood in the context, they will be sharing a Christian faith which has taken genuine shape in the total religious, personal, socio-economic and political context. They will be communicating to a fundamentally religious people who in common with many others are seeking, we believe, for a divinity active in the struggles of history.

Dialogue with Hindus

In dialogueing with Hindus, we are dialogueing with members of a religious tradition which includes great spiritual giants. Only ignorance mixed with arrogance would dismiss all such as not of God, merely human or even evil. But the very openendedness and plurality of Hinduism which makes it easy for the Christian to begin a discussion with a Hindu at any point, makes it impossible for him to reach a conclusion anywhere. In the popular understanding of religious pluralism, all expressions of religion have equal validity. Thus an atheist and a devout Bhakti follower have equally valid stances. The ethical and social implications of such a view are obvious to any observer of Hinduism. The oppressive dimensions of casteism are not merely rooted in economic or social realities, but are reinforced by the religious world view. Any witness to the religious world view of Hinduism must not neglect the religious sanctioning of casteism.

Therefore while Hinduism has a concept that truth has many dimensions and takes a variety of religious forms, the only basis of truth is religious experience. The content of that experience can only be known and authenticated by the individual who experiences it. It cannot be evaluated by

anyone else. This renders it almost impossible to formulate criteria for evaluating truth within any religious experience.

If there are no criteria for evaluating a truth claim, then we cannot present Christ as the answer to people's questions. For there will be a plurality of possible answers, and of possible questions too. For the fundamental category is religious experience.

Therefore the important question is how we can help people make religious judgements on values. How can we help people become critical of a situation where they have never faulted the person oppressing them because both oppressor and the one oppressed are acting through fate? Christian social involvement makes an impact on people who usually do not question these things, precisely because it does make judgements. The issue of making judgements is rooted in religious sanctions. To encourage the validity of making judgements is a "pre-evangelistic" task.

People do form judgements within Hinduism. The religious experience of the vast majority of Hindus who may be committed to the worldview of karma and reincarnation is set in the context of being victims of oppression. Within that situation they are forced to ask questions and make judgements for which their own religious system provides no objective validity. Christian witness and dialogue must therefore not be restricted to only one type of religious experience among literate and sophisticated Hindus. It must begin with the questions and judgements of these marginalised groups, especially the women and the poor. For it was with the questions of these groups that Jesus began to explain the good news, even to the rich. Not all human questions point to the realities and answers of the gospel. The questions of the untroubled rich did not lead them to appreciate the answers of Jesus. It was those rich who experienced for themselves the questions of the marginalised, Zaccheus the outcast and

the prodigal son who experienced degradation, who found in Jesus the answer to their quest. When they found themselves victims of oppression, they asked the right questions and came to Jesus for the answers. That is part of what is meant by repentance.

A crucial area therefore for Christian witness to Hindus is to begin with the questions of the marginalised within Hinduism, the women and the poor, and to share the answers of Jesus which affirm the validity of their questions and of their judgements. The aim of Christian witness is not to enable the literate sophisticated Hindu to have a religious encounter with a mystical figure from another religious tradition. The gospel comes with questions. It enables the questions of the marginalised Hindus to be affirmed, and addressed by the gospel, and addresses those questions to the socially elite Hindu.

The Christian gospel is about breaking down barriers between God and man and between man and man and so addresses issues such as the barriers between rich and poor, caste and outcaste. So the Christian witness cannot be the witness of an individual alone testifying to his own personal religious experience. It must be the witness of the life of a Christian community in which the new life of reconciliation is being expressed. A person's Christian witness must not be confined to claiming a privileged status for his own Christian religious experience as superior to other religious experiences. It must be to witness to his participation in the reality of the reconciliation which his Christian community is experiencing and which he is convinced is mediated to them and offered to all through Jesus Christ.

It is not that judgements are not formed within Hinduism. It is that they are not articulated or expressed because it is a closed system. Christian faith affirms that the questions of the poor are questions which God expects them to ask:

Why am I poor, why am I marginalised, are the leaders really high-born?

The gospel is the answer to the right questions. The context of development work and social involvement is the context in which the right questions can be asked. We must therefore endeavour to gear our Christian social involvement to enable people to make judgements. We must discover where people are in terms of their critical understanding by asking the right questions about people's condition.

Unless these questions like "Why am I marginalised?" are asked with a Christian perspective, people will gain only the secularised view "I must help myself".

Christology

Many of these questions find their focus in our understanding of the uniqueness and universality of Christ. There are three important areas of Christology which must be on our agenda.

The decisiveness of the Christ-event and its meaning for the world of religions.

Christians claim that God has acted decisively for the redemption of the creation in Christ. All of creation must relate to him. Evangelicals have been coming to accept that the Christ-event is affecting the area of ethics throughout the world, for example through the liberation of women and the process of social change. But the area of religious belief is just as much a part of history as the area of ethics, law and order. The religions of the world arose out of certain historical contexts. The renaissance of these religions has been due to their interaction with the historical processes of colonial and missionary history. These religions are part of human history now. They are not beliefs unrelated to history.

Evangelicals have tended to be a-historical, because they think in terms of belief systems. They have not really taken the historicity of Christian revelation seriously. So when they think of other religions they also tend not to take their historicity seriously. But if the event of Christ was decisive for all history, then the world of religions as part of history is affected by it. Our agenda is to discern how.

What is meant by the universality of Christ ?

Dialogue may lead to an increased understanding of the universality of Christ by understanding his activity in other religions. Does the universality of Christ necessarily entail universalism in soteriology or not ?

The place of Christ at the cross roads between East and West

Jesus Christ lived in the Middle East, and the faith which he founded has profoundly shaped and been shaped by the West. We are considering the task of communicating the faith in the religiously pluralistic contexts of the East.

We must first recognize that there is an important difference in the thinking of East and West. Eastern religion tends to be unitive and experiential. It is utilitarian in its outlook and is primarily concerned to win liberation (salvation). Systems of belief and conceptualization of truth are secondary.

Western thought forms are more analytical. They stress truth often in contrast to experience. We well remember the discipleship adage "don't trust your feelings, look at the facts".

What Christological understanding enables us to be truly biblical to bridge this gap, to communicate both to the unitive experiential East and the analytical West? John records Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. What understanding of

"truth-experience" would enable us to develop a Christology for dialogue ?

Conclusion

The agenda for this dialogue and its results are very important, for they will vitally affect our strategy for evangelizing the millions who as communities live with these world views.

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The gospel has been in India for a long time. We need to hear what our Hindu neighbours make of the gospel. They can help us understand ourselves and help us discover how we are perceived.

These papers by Christian and Hindu scholars pose the questions which need to be addressed, suggest guidelines and provide keys for making the gospel relevant to our Hindu neighbours.

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